Price 25 Cents NOVEMBER 1926

THE Illustrated BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE

N.S.E.



Virile Western Tales

$500 in CASH PRIZES for Real Experiences

"The Great Samarkand" by Roy Norton

Also H. Bedford-Jones, William Byron Mowery, Lemuel De Bra, Whitman Chambers, Clarence Herbert New, Bigelow Neal and Others

Ever notice?

SOONER OR LATER most men reach a point, in everyday matters at least, where price is no longer all-important. They begin to look around for "something better." And it is by no means an accident that just at this point so many men turn to Fatima

F A T I M A



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THE BLUE BOOK

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A Captivating Short Novel

The Arnold Legacy By William Byron Mowery 50

The man who wrote "The Loon Lake Patrol" and "Red Heritage" is at his best in this absorbing drama of the North Woods mining country. (Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson.)

Short Stories You Will Remember

Seven on the Red By Joseph Blethen 24

A quaint tale of Alaska and Tahoe Tim, by the gifted author of the Hiram Inkweller stories. (Illustrated by William Molt.)

A Pledge Redeemed By Homer King Gordon 34

Here we have a splendid story of football and of men—the best so far written by the author of "Landlocked Wings." (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

On the Midnight Tide By Carl Clausen 43

Mr. Clausen used to be a sailor himself; and in this vivid story of wild hours at sea, he writes of what he knows. (Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson.)

The Trail of Death By H. Bedford-Jones 73

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Mr. X By C. Francis Burton 98

This unusual story of a man who went to the West to lose his past is memorable indeed. (Illustrated by E. R. Kirkbride.)

Free Lances in Diplomacy By Clarence Herbert New 110

In "Cherchez la Femme" Mr. New offers a specially engaging story of political intrigue in Europe. (Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson.)

The Tub Plays Sheik By E. Whitman Chambers 124

The joyous tale of three motor maniacs who toured the West and rushed in where the angels feared to tread. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

THE CONSOLIDATED MAGAZINES CORPORATION, Publisher, The Blue Book Magazine,
36 South State Street, Chicago, Ill.

LOUIS ECKSTEIN
President

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Office of the Advertising Director, 33 West Forty-second Street, New York City, N. Y.
R. M. PURVES, New England Representative, 80 Boylston St., Boston. LONDON OFFICES, 6 Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C.
Entered as second-class matter July 24, 1906, at the post office at Chicago, Illinois, under the Act of Congress of March 3, 1879.

MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER, 1926

Special Notice to Writers and Artists: Manuscripts and art material submitted for publication in The Blue Book Magazine will only be received on the understanding that the publisher and editors shall not be responsible for loss or injury thereto while such manuscripts or art material are in the publisher's possession or in transit.

Special Note: Each issue of The Blue Book Magazine is copyrighted. Any republication of the matter appearing in the magazine, either wholly or in part, is not permitted except by special authorization.

Lu Chan and the Tongs By Lemuel De Bra 134

A picturesque episode of Chinatown life, skillfully presented by a favorite Blue Book Magazine writer.

The Black Star of Narrapore By Stephen Hopkins Orcutt 138

This latest of these Tales of the Merchant Marine is one of the most fascinating of a deservedly popular series. (Illustrated by Frank Hoban.)

Two Powerful Serials

The Great Samarkand By Roy Norton 7

This, one of the most alluring novels we have ever printed, is the work of that real fiction genius that produced "The Unknown Mr. Kent," "Drowned Gold" and "Captains Three." (Illustrated by William Molt.)

Go-getter Gary By Robert Ames Bennet 152

The conclusion of this stirring Western novel by the author of "Hidden Trails" and "Waters of Strife" has more action to the square inch than any five ordinary stories. (Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson.)

Five Stories of Real Experience

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The lively story of a man who went into business in Central America.

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Mystery with a large *M* pervades this unusual story by a man who insists that it's true.

Fight Like a Man! By Private Anonymous 190

You'll get some good laughs from this confession of a hungry man who sought food and shelter in jail.

My Buddies By James Duffield 192

There's a fine spirit in this feeling chronicle of terrific adventure in the Great War.

SUBSCRIPTION PRICE: $3.00 a year in advance. Canadian postage 50c per year. Foreign postage $1.00 per year. Subscriptions are received by all newsdealers and booksellers, or may be sent direct to the Publisher. Remittances must be made by Draft, Post Office or Express Money Order, by Registered Letter or by Postage Stamps of 2-cent denomination, and not by check, because of exchange charges against the latter.

IMPORTANT NOTICE: Do not subscribe for THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE through an agent unknown to you personally, or you may find yourself defrauded. Many complaints are received from people who have paid cash to some swindler, in which event of course, the subscription never reaches this office.

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE is issued on the first of the month preceding its date (November issue out October 1st), and is for sale by all newsdealers after that time. In the event of failure to obtain copies at news-stands or on trains, a notification to the Publisher will be appreciated.

Advertising forms close three weeks prior to the time of issue. Advertising rates on application.

FOR MEN who want to become independent in the NEXT FIVE YEARS



IN the spring of 1931 two men will be sitting in a down-town restaurant.

"I wonder what's going to happen next year," one of them will say. "Business is fine now—but the next five years are going to be hard ones, and we may as well face the facts."

The man across the table will laugh.

"That's just what they said back in 1926," he will answer. "Remember? People were looking ahead apprehensively—and see what happened! Since then there has been the greatest growth in our history—more business done, more fortunes made, than ever before. They've certainly been five good years for *me* . . ."

He will lean back in his chair with the easy confidence and poise that are the hallmark of real prosperity.

The older man will sit quiet a moment and then in a tone of infinite pathos:

"I wish I had those five years back," he will say.

TODAY the interview quoted above is purely imaginary. But be assured of this—it will come true. Right now, at this very hour, the business men of the United States and Canada are dividing themselves into two groups, represented by the two individuals whose words are quoted. Five years from now there will be ten thousand such luncheons and one of the men will say:

"I have got what I wanted."

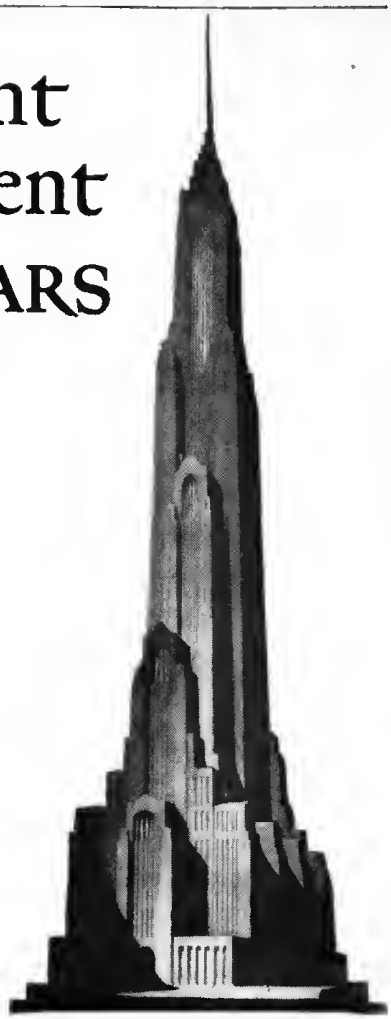
And the other will answer:

"I wish I had those years back."

In which class are you putting yourself? The real difference between the two classes is this—one class of men hope vaguely to be independent *sometime;* the other class have convinced themselves that they can do it within the next five years. Do you believe this? Do you care enough about independence to give us a chance to prove it? Will you invest one single evening in reading a book that has put 250,000 men on the road to more rapid progress?

This book costs you nothing—and for a good reason. It is worth only what you make it worth. It explains how for more than seventeen years it has been the privilege of the Alexander Hamilton Institute to help men shorten the path to success; to increase their earning power; to make them masters of the larger opportunities in business.

"FORGING AHEAD IN BUSINESS" is a cheerful, helpful book. It is yours for the asking. Send for it. Measure yourself by it. Look clearly, for a few moments, into *your* next five years. Whether or not you will follow the path it points is a matter that you alone must decide.



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Send me at once the booklet, "Forging Ahead in Business," which I may keep without charge.

Signature .....
Please write plainly

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Business Position .....

THE BLUE BOOK MAGAZINE
Vol. 44 *NOVEMBER 1926* *No. 1*

Away with Worries!

"YOU can go to bed, but can you go to sleep?" observed a noted writer not long ago. "How often have business men, statesmen, countless members of all crafts, professions and trades, and women of every quality, cried out in vain for a little slumber and found only one restful substitute!

"Lloyd George carried the world's greatest empire through the world's greatest war. But what carried Lloyd George through? He has recently testified that he found his only salvation from collapse in the reading of novels and short stories.

"When the soul is worn out with fatigue, with the turmoil of the day and the anxieties of the morrow, and desperately in need of sleep, the only refuge from all these worries is the swiftest of all steeds, old winged Pegasus. He will sweep you far from earth and its maddening claims. Guide him where you will: through a South Sea paradise, a palace intrigue in Europe, a country lane, a drab side-street, a teasing mystery or a blissful romance. And then to dreamless sleep.

"A book is good. A magazine is better. For if the first story does not carry you off, another kind of story is waiting just a few pages beyond."

To be taken away from yourself, either at bedtime or at any other hour of leisure is indeed a fine thing. To achieve this is perhaps The Blue Book Magazine's chief aim, and it is from this point of view that its stories are chosen. Fiction, as we see it, should *not* propound new problems or awaken old griefs. It *should*, rather, carry you away from your own routine and your own special vexations and cares.

So in this issue you may leave them while you go far away—to share in the quest of "The Great Samarkand" with Roy Norton, for example, or to join in the great mining adventure in William Byron Mowery's fascinating "The Arnold Legacy."

And next month you may count upon at least equal enjoyment. There'll be a memorable short novel "Fortune, Inc.," by George F. Worts, who wrote "The Girl in the Blue Sarong," and other famous stories, and an especially worth-while episode in H. Bedford-Jones' "Trail of Death" series. Lemuel De Bra will offer a stirring cowboy adventure "Peppermint Pete Pitches a Party;" Calvin Ball will bring forward Ed of the garage in the most amusing situation even he has as yet developed; Stephen Hopkins Orcutt will have a new thriller in his "Tales of the Merchant Marine" and Clarence Herbert New a fine exploit of the Free Lances in Diplomacy. The second of the three parts into which we have divided Roy Norton's "The Great Samarkand" carries the interest to a high pitch; Jay Lucas, our hunter-author, will offer "The Black Hound's Story"—a unique animal story based on the deeds of his own cougar-dogs. And five of our readers will tell the most remarkable experiences of their lives. . . . . Yes, if you want to be carried away from your troubles, you'll find The Blue Book Magazine —this month, next month or any other month—heap good medicine.

—The Editors

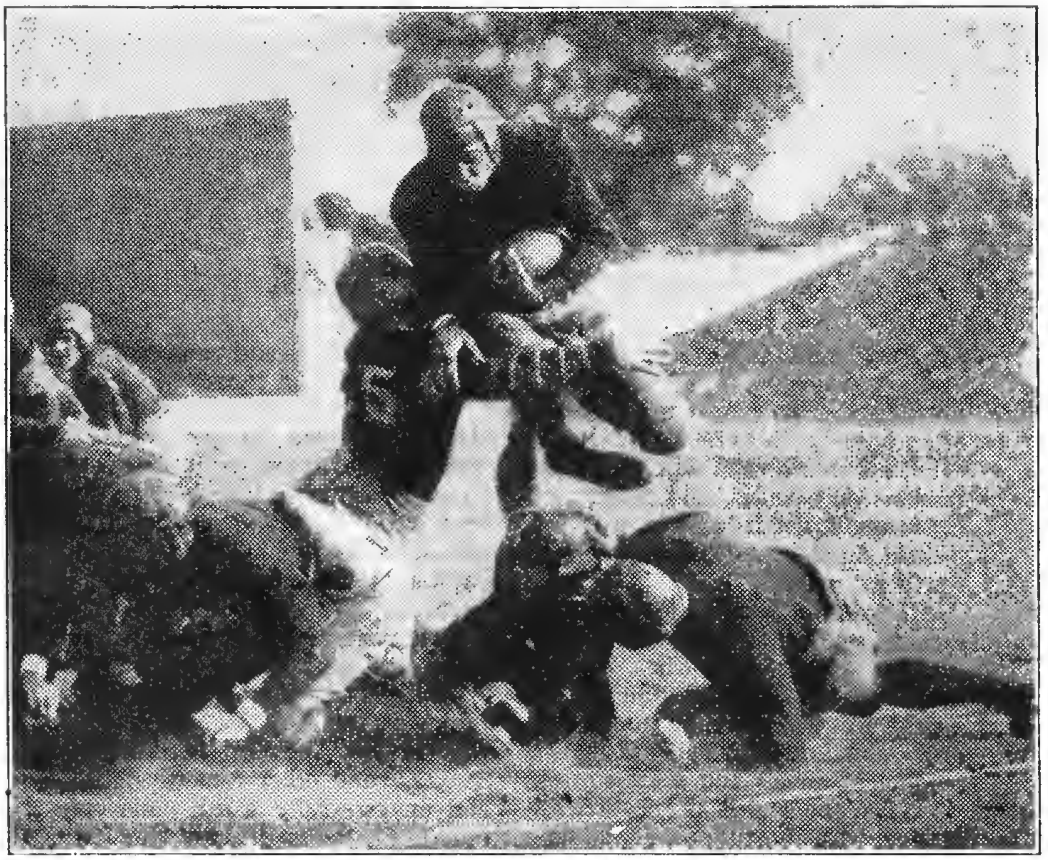


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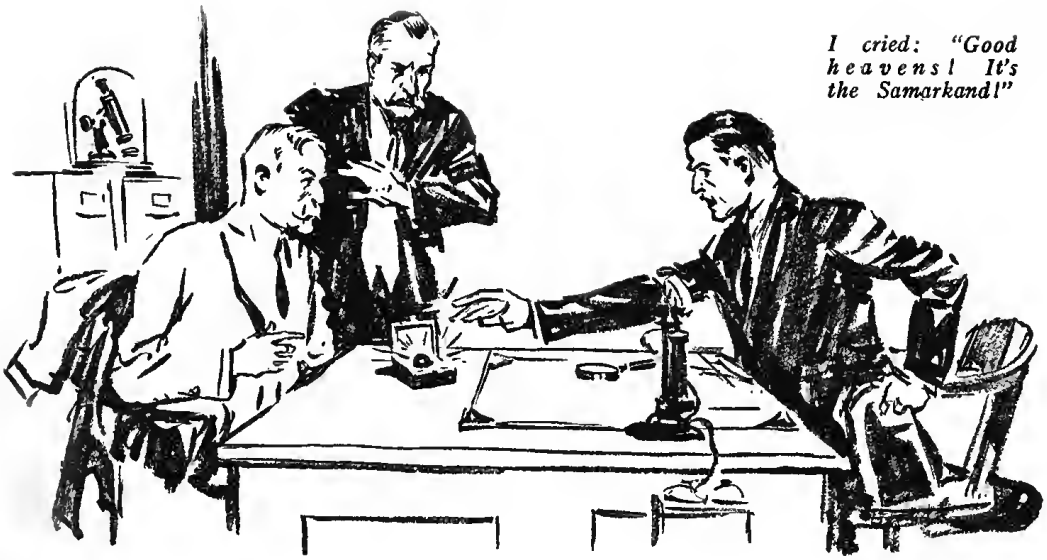
WHEN OLD ENEMIES JOIN BATTLE

"On the next play, the St. Andrews fullback made more than the two yards necessary for a first down. Again Jack was buried under a pile of Baden players.

" 'They're keeping at him, Kathleen,' Rodney explained, his voice tense. 'They'll try to hammer him to pieces.' "

" 'They can't make him quit trying,' she declared, confidently. 'They would kill him first.' "

Frontispiece to accompany "A Pledge Redeemed," beginning on page 34



I cried: "Good heavens! It's the Samarkand!"

The Great Samarkand

The swiftly moving story of the quest for the greatest ruby in the world, by a man who knows every foot of the countries covered in this novel.

By ROY NORTON

Illustrated by William Molt

WHEN I meditate over the history and vicissitudes of the Samarkand, it always seems strange, incongruous and extraordinary that I, John Roberts, should have been one of those beings involved in its fate, and that my own life was thereby changed, molded, decided. When I think of the influence it has exerted for hundreds of years, I speculate why it is that the evils it has wrought have been passed down in tradition and history, while the happiness of which it has perhaps been the agent is all forgotten; for whatever it may have done for others, to me it brought ultimate and enduring content. So I do it the justice of record.

And adequately to prove the influence of the Samarkand upon my life, it is necessary to show that before its intrusion therein I could scarcely be considered a success. Indeed, quite the reverse; for I was born of people with ample means. My father was a distinguished and successful architect in New York City, who endeavored throughout my youth to mold me to follow in his footsteps. I was given an opportunity for education and made but little of it, barely scraping through, never interested in mathematics, engineering or structural beauties. I was sent to the *atelier* of a master in Paris, and—frivoled away my time in the Quartier Latin. I learned nothing save languages, and these I accomplished through no merit of hard work but because I was born with a gift for tongues, and their acquisition was an absorption rather than a directed effort. I always had this gift, if such it may be called. I could read, write and speak four languages before I had reached my twentieth year. In Paris a weird fellow-student from the East was amazed at the ease with which I acquired Arabic, one of the most difficult of languages; and a Greek girl art student of whom I was temporarily enamored insisted that there must be Grecian blood in my veins from the speed with which I attained proficiency in her tongue.

I was no good as a real student, and particularly of architecture. I was a loafer. My one great love of beauty was not for sticks and bricks, but for the blaze of

jewels, their infinite shadings of colors, the taste of their mountings, the cunning of their cuttings, the perfection of their polish.

THE news of my father's death brought me hurrying homeward, and there I learned that, through his unfortunate speculations and misplaced confidence in an associate, I had inherited nothing. Absolutely nothing! That I was penniless, that my days of leisurely dawdling were ended, that to subsist I must work, and that regrets for wasted opportunities were futile. I, who knew nothing practical, tried many occupations, failed in all, and finally got a situation in a little private academy teaching languages. Nothing could have proved more distasteful, more humdrum, or more exasperating, because I could not understand what to me were the densities of my pupils. I couldn't see why they made such a fuss over what to me had been so simple, and—I was fired for continually telling them so.

Later I drifted into a clerkship in a great jewel-house, receiving a wage that merely kept me alive, until by chance I attracted the notice of their gem expert, an aged and kindly man with whom I had the audacity to dispute the matching of a stone. Thus I blundered into his attention, and that fortunate blunder eventually advanced me to the position of his chief assistant. He betrayed an inordinate and almost senile pride in me, boasting of me as his discovery, declaring that I had the perfect eye and the retentive memory for size, shape, quality and color of stones. I had his affection. He had mine. And when he died, and I was promoted to his place, I grieved because of the means of promotion. But for the Samarkand I might have remained in that comfortable position to the end of my life; for my salary was adequate to my needs and desires, my work congenial and absorbing, my superiors just and amiable. My occasional yearnings for travel were amply gratified by those excursions abroad in the interests of the firm to purchase stones. And having no soaring ambitions, socially or financially, I was contentedly appproaching my thirty-fifth year when the Samarkand came into my life.

IT was on a clear midwinter day, when the sun sparkled from the facets of a new-fallen snow and the light in my private office came brilliantly through the big windows, that the head of the firm quietly entered. He was followed by a man with whose likeness I was familiar through pictures in the press. He is dead now, and there is no restriction upon me; but inasmuch as he lives in memory, I shall use other than his real name. Suffice it that he was one of America's wealthiest men, whose beginnings as a millionaire originated in successful mining-ventures in the far West, and who had what the average man would call "an insane hobby" for gems, but what I should style a great love for worthy beauty. He bought great gems because he loved them. His private collection was reported, among the "trade," to be the finest in America. I had passed upon some of its units for him; I had sought matches for others, and his purchases through our firm alone had been munificent; but until that day I had never met him personally.

"Mr. Wakefield," said my employer, "this is our gem expert, Mr. John Roberts."

I felt secretly pleased when our visitor promptly extended his hand, held mine a moment, eyed me with a sharp, searching scrutiny through eyes that were habituated to measuring men and said: "So you are John Roberts, eh? Why—you are a much younger man than I had conceived you to be. I thought you must be old!"

It's a fact that until that moment I had not thought it possible that anyone outside the traffic of jewels could ever have heard of me, and I was flattered. I was scarcely aware that the head of our firm had turned to my assistant and said: "You may leave us for a while. And we are not to be disturbed." It was when he shut my office door and locked it that curiosity became my dominant emotion. We seated ourselves and Mr. Wakefield, with a strange look on his firm, resolute and kindly face, took from the inside pocket of his coat a battered, worn jewel-case, from whose corners the leather had long been frayed, and whose wooden backing was here and there exposed. He snapped it open and said: "I've come to ask you if it is possible that this is a ruby."

He put before me on my desk a livid, glowing, fascinating pool of flame that appeared to snap and scintillate with joy of the sunlight which streamed upon it, flooded it, gave it fresh life. He seemed to appreciate the swift reach of my hands, my stifled exclamation of astonishment, my

temporary bewilderment. And then my eye seized upon a peculiarity of the cutting, upon a very tiny break in an edge at one end, and I cried: "Good heavens! It's the Samarkand!"



"I hate jewelry, pearls and barbaric ornaments," she declared.

HE had been leaning forward in his seat with his hands on the edge of the table, and now with an abrupt relaxation drew a deep breath and settled back into his chair.

"There can be no doubt of it, you think?" he asked, as if for confirmation, as I carried that marvelous gem to the window where a still stronger light crept to its very heart, and studied it. Studied it? I'm not certain that it wasn't a caress! None but a man of my calling can understand the emotions evoked by such a rare jewel, such a historical and distinguished gem, a veritable emperor of stones. In my time I have seen some great rubies in the collections of Indian princes, but never before and never again shall my eyes behold such concentrated beauty and perfection as were embodied in the Samarkand.

My employer examined it, and from his commercial soul muttered: "Three millions. Easily worth three millions. Maybe more. Eh, Roberts? Eh?"

I didn't answer him but glanced at Mr. Wakefield, whose eyes caught mine, and in them I read something akin to contempt for one who could see such beauty and consider only its monetary value. I think I must have indulged in a smile, for I saw a fleeting twitch around Mr. Wakefield's mouth and then he turned to my employer as if answering his words and said, quietly: "No—not three millions. Nor ten. Nor any sum. It is not, nor ever shall be, while I live, on the market. It would be like—

like peddling a queen in a native bazaar!"

With a gesture that was like a reverent caress, shielding, protective, he took the gem, gently closed the case, and replaced it in his pocket. He stood up, buttoning his coat as if to add to its security and then said: "Of course you understand there are reasons, many reasons, why I wish you to say nothing of this, or that the Samarkand is in my possession."

"Yes," said my employer, "we understand. It might be—ummh!—even dangerous."

"Quite so," Mr. Wakefield agreed. "Indeed, I am wondering just what I should do about it." He stared absently at the floor, frowning a little as if concerned with his own thoughts, and finally said: "Well, anyhow, I have it."

MY employer followed him out through the door, and I fell back to my customary tasks, which had become strangely dull and prosaic: six rare diamonds had to be appraised, an antique taken down and weighed; and yet all these had been dwarfed to rubbish, rendered insignificant, under the influence of that brief visit of the Samarkand.

I hadn't got it out of my mind when on the next day I found in my mail a letter in a plain envelope which I read with some slight astonishment.

"Dear Mr. Roberts," it read in a small, neat handwriting, "I would be much gratified if you can (provided you have no other appointment) come to my home on Riverside Drive this evening at nine o'clock, or thereabouts. If this is acceptable, please telephone my secretary so that I can keep my evening for the purpose of our meeting. Yours truly, Henry Wakefield."

Alive with curiosity, hoping that I should have an opportunity of again seeing the Samarkand and also some of his famed collection of jewels, I lost no time in making the appointment. And I rang the bell of that huge, pretentious mansion of his just as the distant clocks struck the hour. I was immediately ushered inward and to a small room that seemed, from its nature, to be the private lounging-place of the millionaire. All the pretense of the house, its surroundings, its interior furnishings and decorations, were lacking here. The leather chairs were deep, worn, comfortable and almost shabby. A miner's battered old gold-pan hung on the wall, and close by a pair of worn snowshoes and an old prospector's pick. A dozen homely keepsakes shouted aloud that they were souvenirs of this man's past and his beginnings of fortune.

At my entrance a girl who had been lounging on the arm of a huge chair arose, and I at once surmised that she must be none other than his niece, his sole surviving relative, who, rumor and gossip declared, was the prospective heiress to his enormous wealth. His first words confirmed my supposition.

"You can stay if you wish, Mercy," he volunteered, and then when she hesitated said: "This is Miss Wakefield, my niece, Mr. Roberts. She is a daughter in all things but one—she does not share my enthusiasm in gems."

She smiled, exposing perfect white teeth in a face that was habitually too calm, intellectual, self-possessed, and her eyes softened with a flash of amusement. She was somewhat distinguished as a beauty, but I thought to myself that I had seen many others her superior.

"Probably you, who my uncle says are a great jewel-expert, will dislike me when I admit that I hate stones, jewelry, pearls and barbaric ornaments," she declared.

"Dislike? No. I have few dislikes, and much recognition of the fact that each of us differs from the rest," I said. "I, for instance, do not care for music, and perhaps envy those who do."

BUT I regarded it as remarkable that this handsome girl, for she was little more than that in years, was not attracted by jewels, which seldom fail to fascinate her sex. Wakefield sat and listened as we talked for a few minutes. His eyes indicated amusement as I defended my obsession, and she thrust again and again at what she asserted was merely an unsurpressed instinct of the primitive; but when she was called from the room, he became immediately serious. He somewhat startled me with his first words.

"Roberts," he said, "I'm in a quandary. I don't know what to do. I've approximately stolen the Samarkand."

My look of astonishment was caught.

"Yes," he said, in his serious, even voice, "to all actualities, I'm a thief. And I want your advice. I can trust you. I've made inquiries. Moreover you and I alike understand the love of stones—not for what they cost, but for themselves. I was further convinced of this yesterday from the

very way in which you handled the Samarkand. I made up my mind that you, with your knowledge of the difficulties of my position, your general knowledge of how jewels are marketed, dealt with, handled, could perhaps tell me better than anyone else what to do."

"Commercially," I objected, "I am a simpleton, a failure. Had you asked the head of our firm, Mr.—"

"The very man I shouldn't ask!" he exclaimed. "All he knows of stones is what they cost and for what profit they should sell. Pfaugh! To him they mean nothing of beauty, of imagination. No, he couldn't understand, and therefore his advice would be worthless. I know that you must be repressing a profound curiosity as to how the Samarkand came to my hands, and what its adventures since it was last in the public knowledge. So I'll tell you all I know. It goes back to the question that has become commonplace, has been so much written and talked of—namely, what became of the crown treasures of Russia that were in the Kremlin when the Bolsheviki burst loose. As you know, many of those jewels found their way to America through Bolshevist emissaries; but have you heard of the trainload of valuables that was hurried eastward? That it disappeared when the Japanese demanded that it should be guarded by their own selected men when it crossed Manchuria en route for Vladivostok, to which it was destined, and that no man of that Russian guard was ever heard from again, nor that treasure-train? Do you know that strange jewels have since been sold by Japanese, and that there is a possibility that the gold derived from those sales is at this moment in the Japanese treasury?"

I TOLD him that I had heard of such rumors, but was without definite or credible knowledge of any kind.

"Well," he said, thoughtfully, "that great ruby came to me through the hands of a Russian on whom I took pity and have made a sort of man-of-all-work around my house. He is an extreme rarity, for as far as I know, he is the sole survivor of the Russian guard that was to protect that treasure-train to Vladivostok. The extermination was effected one night outside of Harbin. This man, due to the fact that the few crude sleeping berths were all occupied, had crawled beneath one, and to that exigency owes his life. Recognizing his helplessness when the deliberate slaughter took place, he remained in hiding. The Japanese had to transfer the treasure to other cars, because, as you may remember, the Russian railways do not use a standard gauge, whereas the Japanese do. Hence the rolling-stock could not be switched off at that tragic junction, but was emptied and afterward burned.

"In the confusion the sole survivor of the massacre succeeded in escaping to a place close at hand which offered concealment. From there he witnessed the transfer, and subsequent destruction of the Russian rolling-stock, which was used as a funeral pyre, a crematory, for his murdered comrades. And then the new treasure-train rolled off into the night toward Japan, and he was left alone.

"He says that he saw a case drop and burst open while the transfer was being made, and that after a long time he went to that spot hoping to find anything of value that would help him on his way; for he had but little money. He found a heavy gold goblet, battered and bent, which he seized with great delight, and then the case containing the Samarkand. He was disappointed in the latter. He thought it nothing more than a pretty and probably valueless stone, or a specimen of finely colored glass. He knew nothing of rubies. He was going to throw it away, and kept it solely because it took up little room in his overcoat. Once, in his flight across Manchuria, he tried to trade it for a loaf of bread and was laughed at. But he was lucky enough to get through to Vladivostok, and there to get a job as stoker on a tramp bound for Vancouver, and his superstition led him to attribute some of his good fortune to his piece of cut glass. So he clung to it as a good-luck piece, and for years he has kept it.

"I found him one night when he was being driven from a park bench by a policeman, took pity on him because I could see that he was not an ordinary tramp, gave him some change and told him to come to my gardener the next day if he wanted to work. He came punctually, and nothing but his insistence got him a place, because I had forgotten to speak to the gardener. He proved himself so willing, so kindly and such a handy man, that the gardener has conceived a great liking for him. Also, this strange exile is fond of children and formed a great attachment for the gardener's child, a little girl.

"Well, one day recently I went into my garden at an early hour and out to the hothouse. The little girl was in there playing in an unused corner. Had a house laid out with pieces of sticks, bricks and stones, and there among the lot in a place of honor in what she called her parlor, was the Samarkand. You may imagine my surprise, my excitement, and the investigation I immediately instituted.

"When I traced it down to that poor devil of a Russian and took him to this den to question him, he was frightened and imploring. He thought he was to be accused of theft of some sort, and in his broken English begged me to have mercy and not discharge him. He had no hesitancy whatever in telling me how he came into possession of what he thought to be nothing but a bauble. It wasn't that which terrified him, but the fact that he had found that gold goblet and disposed of it piecemeal. He feared that he was to be sent back to Russia, or perhaps to Japan, for that. What an absurd fear—what ignorance! But to this poor devil his jeopardy was real—his life at stake, his contentment in occupation ended. I'm convinced he told me the truth of how he came into possession of that priceless gem. And whatever happens, I shall see that he is provided for in some adequate way as long as he lives. So now I come to my own predicament."

HE paused as if to assert a collection of difficulties, put them in order and sequence before laying them in front of me. For the moment he was aloof, motionless, and absorbed in this mental occupation, and then he smiled and shook his head like a schoolboy caught in dereliction.

"I'm—I'm a mighty poor lawbreaker," he said, and then qualified it with "—in my later years. I uphold it for two reasons: one that it's right, and the other that it pays. First, I can't return the Samarkand to its real owners, for they are gone—wiped out—brutally murdered. Second, it would be criminal to surrender it to the gang that now rules the state from which the ruby was stolen, because it would merely add to a treasury whose avowed purpose is the debauchment of the world of law, order and peace, as we deem these conditions best served. Third, I am not going to betray that poor devil of a Russian exile to anybody, or any law. He has suffered enough to give a score of men their full share of tribulations, has escaped with his life, is happy here, and trusts me. Fourth, if I don't declare the gem to the Customs authorities, I'm virtually a thief, an abettor of smuggling, a receiver of stolen goods. Fifth, if I do go quietly and make my declaration, I've got to tell how such a gem came into my hands, admit that I'm not its lawful owner, and—I don't know what happens then. And lastly, I'd probably have to part with it, and you who know I don't give a damn for money, and who can understand a man's actual affection for something of such superlative beauty, can therefore sympathize with what I called my great predicament and possibly advise me. You know at least what happens to gems brought forward in similar circumstances."

"I don't," I hastily disclaimed. "Similar circumstances? I never heard of such a case, nor anything approaching it. I know of ordinary confiscations, and subsequent governmental disposals; I know of the punishments for smuggling, for jewel-thieving, of restitutions and so forth; but nothing within my experience is applicable to this situation. Furthermore, have you considered the possibilities of danger involved in the possession of this stone?"

"How?" he asked, as if for the first time such thought had been put before him.

"Think of the great newspaper story, which means publicity to an exceptional extent, not confined to our country alone but actually international in its breadth. Suppose you told the entire, candid truth—don't you see that you lay yourself open to the avaricious greed of the greatest thieves in the world, as well as the determination of those from whose clutches the Samarkand slipped to recover it by any means at their command? Do you think a gang of Bolshevist emissaries would hesitate to murder you for it? Why, that stone is worth more than the Cullinan diamond, which is the largest in existence and is the prized piece of the crown-jewel collections of the world. You would give five million dollars for the Samarkand, and you are one of America's very wealthy men, to whom five millions doesn't mean so much. Think, therefore, how much that sum, or a fifth of it, means to those whose attention you would attract!

"Let's carry it further. If you would pay five million, I haven't a doubt that there are rajahs in India, where rubies are almost sacred gems, and coveted above all others, who would pay double or treble

that sum for it. Here's another point that you have overlooked—Japan. If your man's story is true, the Japanese committed wholesale murder for treasure, and if this leaked, the Japanese gangsters—I don't say it was the government, mind you—will consider themselves robbed of some mil-



"When the deliberate slaughter took place, he remained in hiding."

lions. Some of them might try to recover. In that event your life wouldn't stand in the way, and your Russian protégé would have his throat cut merely through vindictiveness, or to silence a witness forever."

Mr. Wakefield listened judicially to all I had to say, and then with a perplexed frown seemed waiting for me to continue.

"Well? What then?" he asked, leaning forward toward me.

"As far as I can see, there's only one answer. Silence—absolute! I'd never tell another human being what you have told me. If my conscience hurt me, I'd remit, somehow, to the Government, for that so-called 'conscience fund' concerning which stories now and then appear, what would be a fair payment of duties. And that would end it, for my lifetime, at least."

I sat and watched him as he meditated over my advice. I wondered if that keen mind of his, so used to the stratagems of high finance, would find any way out of his predicament other than the one I had suggested. And then, when he did speak, his words were a surprise.

"If you cared to assume some of the dangers attendant on such an undertaking, I think I see one course open," he said. "And furthermore, you are the only man I know whom I could trust for such a task. Why couldn't I give you the Samarkand, and—"

"Give me the Samarkand?" I blurted in astonishment.

"Yes. It was smuggled into this country, so it shouldn't be difficult to smuggle it into another. You would then return with it, openly declare it, pay the Customs duty on it, and afterward sell it to me." His eyes twinkled as he leaned back in his seat and awaited my reply.

It was such an amazing proposition that my mind raced over the possibilities presented. How could I account for its possession? What reasonable story could I tell for its acquisition? What might follow thereafter if either Bolshevist stratagems, or Japanese cunning, evolved plots to prove me a thief and recover the coveted property? Was there danger in merely carrying it across the ocean to Holland, or some place in the near East and then returning with it? The latter seemed improbable if its secrets were known thus far to but three men, one a poor devil of a Russian whose vital interests necessitated secrecy, the other this distinguished millionaire who was fascinated by sheer beauty, and myself, who was too inconspicuous to be a suspect.

My thoughts were interrupted by Mr. Wakefield, who said: "See here. I don't wish you to take snap judgment on this. Consider it for a few days before you give me an answer. You may think of some obstacle that I've not foreseen. You may—"

He hadn't time to conclude. The door opened, and his niece came in with a polite sentence that she hoped she didn't intrude. Personally I thought she did. But I was relieved to have a legitimate excuse in the lateness of the hour for making my departure, and remember that I walked homeward in something like a maze of thought, wondering whither and how far an acceptance of this mission might lead me.

CHAPTER II

IT impresses me as extraordinary, in retrospect, that during the following night and day I found so many objections to the proposed undertaking. My sole excuse for hesitancy is that I was contented with my life in its placid occupations and its pleasant certainties. I was loath to leave a position that was in itself a pleasure. Travel had lost its charms. The assumption of such responsibility was great, and there was always the chance of my being involved in a somewhat embarrassing position if I were called upon to justify my title to the incomparable jewel. Could I have gone openly to my employers, revealed my mission and asked for a few weeks' leave of absence, the situation would have been simplified; but from this recourse I was debarred by the very circumstances and conditions in which Mr. Wakefield found himself.

And all these cogitations I voiced when, on the third night, I revisited him. My mind was nearly fixed upon refusal. He swept away my objections as chaff is blown by a gale. My position with the firm? Nonsense! He would give me five hundred thousand dollars for carrying his business through to successful termination. Work? There would be no further need for me to work. Gems? Did I wish to keep in contact with gems, I could thereafter be his special commissioner. Money? No expense-account I might run would be of importance to him. Possibilities of danger? There could be none.

I went from his house that night committed to the undertaking and regarding myself as one who had accidentally rubbed the lamp of fortune. I was astounded by the generosity of his offer, not stopping to consider that after all payments, he would still have come into undisputed title and possession of the Samarkand for comparatively nothing. He intended to set aside a quarter of a million for the Russian which—heaven knows!—that individual couldn't spend and wouldn't know what to do with. Add to this a half-million for me, my outlay, his payments to the Customs, and he would still be an enormous gainer by his transaction. But to be fair to his memory, I am convinced that this side of the situation never crossed his mind. It was the gem he wanted.

My employers were astonished and quite frankly despondent when I tendered them my resignation. It had never been in my mind that they so highly regarded me, or that they esteemed my services irreplaceable. I tried to convince them that my chief assistant was competent, but they insisted that he had not my genius for remembering colors. I had no legitimate excuse to offer for my desertion save that there were certain private reasons why I must go abroad.

They offered me a vacation; but I, having in view an easily earned fee of half a million dollars, didn't consider it fair to promise to resume work. They then insisted that my separation from the firm should not be irrevocable until after my return; and I, fearing that this connection might involve them in a scandal if things went wrong, had to decline; but I finally consented to make certain purchases for them which were in the order-books and that would necessitate my going to Amsterdam, that jewel mart of Europe. I

did this because it would serve as an excuse for my presence abroad, in case anyone became inquisitive. Furthermore, an open visit to Amsterdam might assist me to account for my possession of the jewel in the possible event of my being brought before a court of inquiry. Yet I suffered the pangs of reluctance and doubt on the day when, for the last time, I closed the desk that had so long and so happily been mine, and turned the keys over to my successor.

There are a lot of misconceptions regarding the jeopardies of the gem experts. It is a current fiction that they customarily travel loaded down with jewels over which they pass sleepless hours of care and watchfulness, that they are in constant fear of thieves or in peril of their lives, that their calling is hazardous and dangerous. But as a matter of fact the usual method is to make purchases, carefully list and seal them, entrust them to the care of the great express or shipping companies, and adequately insure them and their delivery. There isn't a reputable jewel-house in America that makes the slightest attempt to evade the Customs. There is not to my personal knowledge a gem-buyer for any of the great and dignified firms in America who ever crossed the Atlantic with other than his personal, intimate articles of jewelry on his person. A thief who robbed any of the great gem-experts in transit as a rule couldn't pay from the proceeds the price of his passage. So, ordinarily, I should have "shipped" the Samarkand to Amsterdam. The necessity for secrecy, once it had been entrusted to my care, was the cause of my first distress. I couldn't follow the routine. I couldn't neglect its protection. I couldn't evade a responsibility which was magnified because Mr. Wakefield had so implicitly, so confidently, entrusted me. I was the confidant of his perplexities, his desires and his objectives, as well as the guardian of the world's greatest gem. Hence that worn leather case, sewed inside my underwear, felt monstrous and malignant on the day when land vanished from the westerly view, and the screws of the steamer that bore me took on the persistent, busy speed that they would maintain for the voyage.

TO the veteran *voyageur* all trips across the Atlantic are monotonous and dull, particularly in the season when tourists and pleasure-seekers are few. The first class was not by any means fully booked, and the second appeared scarcely more occupied. At my table there were but five other passengers, two of them commercial agents, two of Hebraic origin, and the fifth a Japanese student making his first trip abroad. The Jews were en route for the new Mecca of their race, Telaviv, in Palestine, where they proposed to go into the clothing business; and the Japanese was frankly going abroad to study European trade-conditions, hoping to profit thereby. To me he was the most interesting of my fellow-passengers. On the second day out he gravely distributed his card, badly printed, *"Takiyamo Fungeri, Tokyo, Studant."*

He seemed to be untraveled and ingenuous but observant, and having learned from the ship's doctor that I crossed nearly every year, shyly attached himself to me in the rôle of questioner. He spoke fairly good English, but much better French, having, as he explained, methodically studied the latter language for three years for the purposes of this visit. He seemed to accept me as a living "traveler's guide," and made innumerable inquiries as to hotels that might suit his purse, trains, railways and routes. He amused me, particularly with his American impressions chiefly gained, as he admitted, from a stay—his longest in one city, by the way—of seven days in New York. It was astonishing, however, what a complete superficial knowledge he had of the latter city, and I could but admire his thoroughness. I was also secretly amused at the naïveté with which he told me he was going first to Amsterdam to observe the diamond-cutting industry, learn how it was done, and compare it with the methods in his own country, and that he thought two days would suffice. Two days for a subject in which an apprentice learns but the rudiments in two years!

On my previous trips to Amsterdam I had always patronized the Ristoria Hotel, but this time I hesitated, for to its staff I was known as a somewhat prominent jewel-expert. At first I questioned whether it might not be best to avoid places where I was known. Then came the thought that if I were eventually driven to account for my movements, the more openly I moved, the better. Hence, after wavering, I went to the Ristoria.

This hotel has a most peculiar feature in its interior decorations of the upper floors. The hallways are, or at least then were, wainscoated uniformly in plain Jap-

anese matting and paneled with a uniform imitation of bamboo. The numbers above the doors are small, and on a gloomy day almost indistinguishable, making it difficult to identify one's own passage. The door of each suite when opened enters a tiny hallway in which there is a hand basin on the left, a door to the right leading into a bathroom, while directly in front is the door into the main chamber. A peculiarity is again disclosed in that the door for the bathroom revolves so cunningly and economically that it serves for both the chamber and the bathroom. Hence, when the bathroom door opens, it becomes the door for the chamber, shutting it off entirely, or vice versa. The bathroom door is therefore naturally closed when one leaves his bedchamber. It was to this peculiar arrangement that I owed an accidental discovery on the third day after my arrival in the picturesque old city.

I had been visiting various places filling the commissions given me by the firm from which I had resigned, and in the gloom of a wintry day walked through the unlighted hall of the hotel to my suite. In a somewhat abstracted mood, for the difficulties of my mission were always in my mind, I went one door too far down the corridor, opened it and stepped in. The single door that served both bathroom and bedchamber was closed on the latter. Thinking that this must be due to the carelessness of a servant, I switched on the light and opened the door in front of me. I heard a startled exclamation, the movement of chairs scraped back across the carpet, and found myself staring at two men who had evidently been seated on opposite sides of a small writing-table and had been disturbed by my unexpected entrance.

INSTANTLY I realized that I was in the wrong suite; but that was not all. One of the men was my ingenuous young Japanese acquaintance, Takiyamo of Tokyo, and the other man was one whom I had never seen before, but was such a contrast to his companion as to make him instantly notable. He was dark of skin, heavy-featured, with black hair, a well-shaped mustache and finely shaped eyebrows—and built like a Hercules. His stature could have been scarcely less than six feet and four inches, and he appeared to tower above the lithe little Japanese like a veritable colossus. They had the advantage of position, with their backs to the window on the farther side of the room, but even so I could discern the big man's frown of annoyance, his quick side-glance at Takiyamo as if questioning the latter for the meaning of this intrusion. The Japanese instantly recovered his composure and advanced upon me with quick steps, paused and made the characteristic deep bow of his country.

"Ah—Meester Rubberts! Me give you pleaser to again see so—" And then abandoning his painful English for his quite fluent French he hastily went on: "Strange that we should again meet so soon after my arrival! I came but this afternoon from Rotterdam to pursue my studies of the diamond industry. I remembered that you said this hotel was expensive, but I lost the names of the others more moderate you recommended."

I smiled at the recollection of that memoranda book of his in which he invariably, constantly and somewhat annoyingly jotted down perpetual notes and observations, and wondered how he could get along with it, even as I voiced my apologies and explanations for my intrusion. His companion in the meantime had deliberately turned his back and stood with hands in pockets apparently staring out of the window over the array of quaint, red-tiled roofs and forest of chimney-pots that stretched away toward the spire of a great old church. Takiyamo lost no time in getting me from the room. His hands, when he finally decided to follow the European custom, caught mine and gently but unmistakably impelled me toward the door.

"I have some business to transact with the gentleman inside," he said, apologetically, "and will hasten to conclude it and call upon you. He is from my country's embassy and—that is, he is—but I have not asked the number of your suite. It is what? I shall honor myself by calling upon you within a few minutes. But now I must—you understand, monsieur?"

"Most certainly," I answered, and told him my number. As he closed the outer door upon me, I had a glimpse of the man by the window, who was holding his head sidewise as if to catch the last words of our conversation. It seemed strange that such a man, although unquestionably of some Eastern race, should be connected with the Japanese embassy. It is the custom of that nation, quite wisely and considerably different from the American, to employ none but pure-bred subjects in her embassies and legations.



Instantly I realized I was in the wrong suite.

ON the following day while in a broker's office I met with what seemed to me at the time good fortune. The broker, who was an old business acquaintance, slyly called to my notice two men who were occupying his attention when I arrived, and whispered: "Unquestionably Bolsheviki who have some confiscated jewels to sell."

Now, ordinarily men of this stamp aroused in me no other emotion than keen dislike, not untinged with curiosity; for a vivid imagination is not required to surround anything of which they dispose with the grim hue of red tragedy, or sordid misery. But now, here at hand, was a suggestion for my private plot, my possible alibi. I excused myself from waiting and passed out into the street where, in a convenient doorway I watched for the two men. When they came, I immediately intercepted them.

"Pardon me," I said, "but a short time ago I saw you in the office of Mynherr Rechkampf. I too am a purchaser of jewels, provided you have what I seek." And took from my pocket one of my old business cards.

For gentlemen who advocated and presumably practiced the universal brotherhood of mankind, they were decidedly stand-offish. They didn't seem to trust me, but they promised if they found time to let me hear from them on the following day. Feeling that I had taken the wrong method of approach, I left them; but happening to glance back as I made the first turning in those crooked, delightful old streets, I saw them reëntering the shop of the broker, and smiled to myself. I suspected that they were going to make inquiries regarding me and my bona-fides. It proved true, for while I was dining in lonely leisure in my hotel, two of them called, and this time I made no mistake, for I began my overtures by inviting them to coffee and cigarettes in the lounge. They had no objections to vodka despite the prohibition sentiments supposed to prevail in their country, and showed some inexperience in the sale of jewels by telling me that they had a case of their most valued stones with them for my inspection.

"That for me would be useless," I said, declining their proffer. "I must have day-

light to make the purchases I seek." And then, glancing over my shoulder, I saw that another party had entered while we had been sitting there, and was not entirely out of earshot had its members been disposed to eavesdrop. An habitual caution impelled me to give the Russians advice, and I motioned them to join me in another seat farther removed, and behind a huge, four-leaved ground-glass screen that formed a sort of invalid's corner away from possible draughts. Looking their surprise, they followed me, and the waiter brought our refreshments to the nook.

"I brought you in here," I said, "because it was unwise of you to talk so loudly, even as it was unwise to bring with you the parcel of gems of which you spoke. Furthermore, I think it might be best, rather than carry such property on your persons through the night in a strange city, that you let me have your case locked up in the hotel safe tonight. I suppose your inquiries have convinced you of my honesty, and offer this merely as a friendly suggestion."

THEY had the good sense to agree with me, and after making certain that we were unwatched, the case was transferred to my pocket. It was not too soon, for one of my visitors suddenly felt his vodka. It is one of the curses of that insidious rye brandy that up to the moment it takes effect its victim is blissfully unconscious of the kick to come. But then he certainly knows—usually too late!

"Yes, yes, monsieur. It is time we left!" the soberer of my visitors exclaimed with an apprehensive look at his companion, and turned to the latter to insist upon immediate departure. I was just pushing my chair back from the table when, discerning a shadow through the screen glass I looked upward. A man so tall that his black eyebrows, large dark eyes and blue-black hair were visible above the top of that six-foot screen, was taking a hasty glance into our seclusion. There was nothing in that to alarm me in a country where one comes constantly into contact with foreigners who are not devoid of almost childlike and sometimes impertinent curiosity; but I thought hastily of what that interloper's stature must have been, and somehow my mind swished to the picture of that huge man I had seen in Takiyamo's room. I looked for the sight of a man that tall when we passed from behind the screen, but the room and the lobby were both empty, and the intruder, whoever he was, had disappeared.

Nor did I see anyone when, having made an appointment with the Russians for the following forenoon, I returned from the door and made my way to the manager's office, where I obtained a large envelope, some sealing-wax, and sealed and deposited the packet of jewels in the hotel safe. Even as I did so I smiled inwardly, thinking how much greater value was even at that moment securely resting in a chamois bag against my breast beneath my underwear—the Samarkand. In the privacy of my room a short time later I took it from its case and gloated over its beauty before retiring to rest. No, gloating isn't quite the word to express my emotions, for it was not mine, although it was the key to my fortunes, and the object of my solicitude. I think that in some inexplicable way there had been formed between the Samarkand and me a bond of companionship, or friendship—I am not certain which. In my dream that night it came to life and told me long tales of past centuries, of dead loves and hates, of many a lost enterprise, many an intrigue.

I was awakened by my Russian visitors, who came a full hour earlier than that appointed, and after making a hasty toilet I had them sent up to my room. Sent up with the Continental breakfast of coffee and rolls, as it were, for they arrived together. And their arrival provoked astonishment.

The man who had left me in comparatively sober guardianship of his comrade came in with a bandage wrapped compactly around his head, and his fellow, who should by all rules of compensation have been the sufferer, was grave but clear-eyed.

"Our jewels—you have them safe?" the clear-eyed man asked without preliminaries.

"I presume so," I replied. "I will ask the office to send the sealed parcel up, and we can see." And I immediately telephoned to the manager's office.

"What has happened—an accident?" I asked of the bandaged man.

"Wait until we get our parcel again. It's—it's a story. Incredible! Cannot understand it!" he mumbled; and I, being hungry, poured my coffee.

The manager appeared in person, handed me the packet and asked for the receipt he had given me, which, after examining the seals, I returned. I gave the package to the clear-eyed man, who hastily tore off

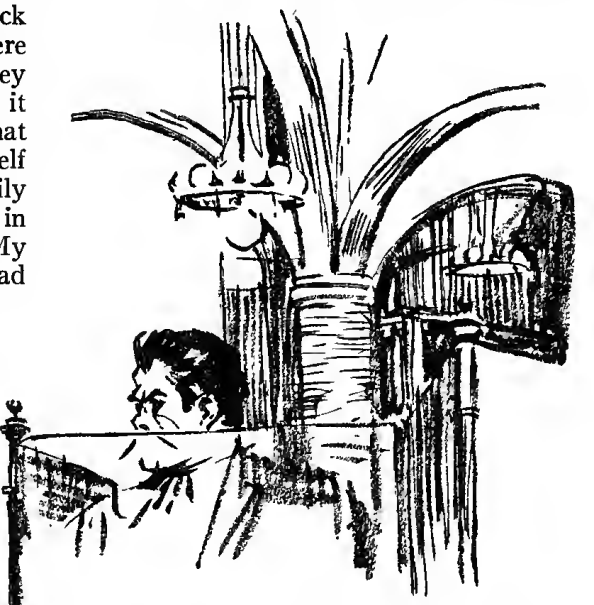
the cover, opened the case, looked for a moment, then snapped the catch shut and with a great exhalation of relief said in his native tongue: "Thank God!"

Placidly I continued with my breakfast. But he turned to me and said, in his thick French that created *liaisons* where there were none, and omitted them where they should have been: "Monsieur, we owe it to your experience, wisdom and advice, that these were not stolen last night. I myself was in somewhat of a daze, and was easily overpowered when we were fallen upon in a dark narrow street by three men. My comrade fought until struck over the head



A man was taking a hasty glance into our seclusion.

with some implement that rendered him unconscious. After that they knelt upon us and searched us with the most absurd, the most ridiculous, the most meticulous care. They even took off our shoes, broke off the heels—in fact, practically stripped us. And the part that convinces me that they were after the jewels we brought to you is that they took nothing from us. They despised our watches, our money, our personal things like rings and scarf-pins, and they took—nothing! Positively nothing! Of course we did not know this until we reached a pharmacy near by, where the dispenser, aroused from sleep, attended to my comrade's wound and we



had leisure to examine our pockets. But for you, monsieur, we should have lost a very valuable collection of jewels and—we cannot sufficiently thank you."

I found myself speculating, under this glib recital, as to its truth. The man's recountal sounded sincere, but—

There seemed no use in wasting time.

I had my breakfast cleared away, locked the door to make certain that we should be unmolested, and examined the contents of their case. They were good enough. Indeed, there were four rather exceptional stones that I decided to buy for the firm. Evidently the Bolshevists had already had them to a sufficient number of places to determine their value, for they named a price that, while not a bargain, was not excessive; and I took them. There was one rather fine ruby in the lot to which the man with a bandaged head called my attention in a rather unusual way.

"Are you not interested in rubies?" he asked. "Of course this is not so great as the lost Samarkand, but perhaps—"

I lifted my eyes to his and found him staring at me with a level, fixed stare. I have the reputation of being a pretty good poker-player, and impassive; but I sometimes wonder if I started then, if my look carried anything unusual, if in any way I betrayed my custodianship. I do know that

I was aware of the possibilities of danger.

"The Samarkand ruby? No, this isn't the Samarkand, monsieur; but if it were, I should try to buy it. Have you it for sale? Where is it?"

I stared at him as fixedly as he had been staring at me, and he burst into a throaty laugh.

"That," he said, "is one of our greatest mysteries. No, we don't know where it is, or precisely how it disappeared, but we surmise that it is either in America or Japan. Hence I thought that you, knowing the trade of America, might inform me."

It was my turn to cover myself with a laugh, and I sat carelessly expectant, and watchful, resolved that no word, look or action of mine would give them any response to whatever suspicions they might have cherished. For a time they both studied me, and then the man with the bandage looked at his companion and shook his head. He said something in Russian, and of that tongue I knew a smattering, enough to decide that what he said was: "No, this man knows nothing of it. He can tell us nothing."

Immediately thereafter they made ready to depart, and I accompanied them to a bank where I paid them, took their receipts and my purchases. We parted in outward friendliness, as men who had merely accomplished a business transaction; but I walked from there direct to a steamship agency, resolved to leave for America by the first boat. And yet I was not done with them; for on that night they again visited my hotel, informing me that they had just learned that another consignment of gems was coming, and asking if I would care to have the first look at them.

SOMETHING prompted me to tell them I would see them and was content to remain over for a week or ten days for such an opportunity. And they, as if greatly pleased, insisted upon proffering hospitality, which I found it difficult to refuse. I drank but little, for I am habitually abstemious; nor did they drink as heavily as on the preceding night. They were distinctly sober when I bade them good night at the hotel entrance. As they crossed the street at the end of the great bridge, I hesitated and then stepped outside the door and into the darkness; for it seemed to me that, as they turned the corner and disappeared, a dim shape, shadowy in the night, of an exceptionally large man, moved from a doorway and slipped after them.

Still thinking of this, I went to my room, undressed thoughtfully, took the Samarkand from its case again to make sure that it was still safe, drank a small bottle of that excellent Dutch beer which I appreciated as a sleeping draught, and went to sleep with contentment of a decision made. I had resolved to be off for America on the following morning after leaving a note breaking my engagement with my Bolshevist friends, whom I suspected. Likewise, I recalled, just as I went to sleep, I must leave a polite note telling Mr. Takiyamo, "Studant," that I had left in such haste I had been unable to bid him good-by.

CHAPTER III

I BOARDED a small steamer on the following morning and applied to the purser for a stateroom which the agent had assured me I could obtain without difficulty. Much to my annoyance, I learned that I could consider myself fortunate in having one upper berth in a stateroom for four, that being the last available. A party of French and Dutch business men going to America to participate in an international trade congress had taken almost the entire first-class quarters, and the ship was of a character which made the second class anything but desirable. Had I not carried on my person that fabulous gem, I should have accepted the situation placidly, for I was too seasoned a traveler not to endure patiently surplus companionship for such a brief time; but the Samarkand in its case, rubbing my skin at each inspiration of my chest, made me vastly dissatisfied because I could not have a stateroom to myself. I wished that I had known of my predicament sooner, in which case I could have broken my plans and either sought another ship, or taken the risks of shipping the jewel with those others which I had purchased and forwarded to my firm. Yet, on consideration, I knew that the latter method would not at all have suited the circumstances, and so resigned myself to my discomforts when we put to sea. And there were discomforts enough, heaven knows! It wasn't possible to have a bath in private. It wasn't possible to shave in private. In fact, there was no such thing as privacy for passengers on a ship crowded to its capacity, and built so many years



"Mac, I've been robbed—I don't know when or where!"

before, that privacy hadn't been considered a necessity. I was compelled to solace myself in the thought of the leisures and aspirations that would reward me for the final delivery of the Samarkand.

When the great beacon came into view as our ship lumbered into port, I anticipated the surprise that would overwhelm one man, my very good friend, Mac Masters, chief expert jewel-appraiser for the Customs department. We had on many occasions wrangled over the value of gems, derided each other for mistakes, had small bets on weights or the matching of colors. Frequently we had asked each other's judgment, and I still insist that Mac—now dead—was one of the greatest jewel-experts who ever handled a gem.

THE men of the trade are well known to the Customs department. Those who are engaged by the very prominent firms are given special treatment, inasmuch as it is known that if they have business to transact it will be on such a scale that it will save time to get them immediately through to the Customs official with whom they will declare. Hence the boat had scarcely docked before I was off and by special request put through to Mac Masters himself. I wanted to pass him personally, because I hoped to keep the entry of the Samarkand into New York an absolute secret.

Mac greeted me facetiously, his bushy eyebrows working up and down as he asked: "What junk have you got to declare now? Rubbish as usual, I suppose."

"Think so, you old bluffer? I'll show you in a few minutes," I boasted.

"What is it? A medicine-bag, or some East Indian ancestral charm?" he asked when he saw that I was compelled partly to disrobe to get access to the bag and case suspended beneath my undershirt.

I said nothing, but took the worn leather case from its covering and handed it to him unopened. I watched his face for the first gasp of open-mouthed astonishment, for his glow of admiration when he saw the greatest and most flawless gem of its kind in existence. I anticipated his outburst of questions as to how I had found it, bought it, from whom, and where. Somewhat to my impatience, he stood with it in his hand, inclined to gossip.

"Haven't seen you for weeks and weeks," he said. "Didn't know you'd been over to the other side. Say, is there anything in this whisper that's been passed around that you aren't working any longer for the big fellows?"

"Well, I've not entirely broken connection with them," I replied. "I bought some stuff for them in Amsterdam which will come along through the express company pretty soon. But—what do you think of that thing you've got in your paws?"

He looked at the case, then snapped the lid open. I watched him expectantly. He moved over to the light, took another look, snapped the case shut, faced me, and with a grin tossed the case back to me.

"Come on with the real stuff," he said. "I'm too old to be kidded."

"Are you? Huh! Strikes me you're so confounded wise that you can't believe your own eyes any more," I bantered. "You think that anything that large couldn't be real, eh? Well, old son, that

thing you've been looking at is the Samarkand!"

"Samarkand? The only ruby of its class in the world? The lost Samarkand, as the writing-boys call it when they want to fill space in the trade journals? That's not the Samarkand. It's a piece of nicely painted glass!"

"Take another look," I insisted, proffering him the case.

"What's the use? Look at it yourself if you want to," he retorted.

WITH a sense of proud exultation I snapped the lid open, intending to force its contents upon his inspection. And then my eyes fell upon it, its dullness astounded me, and I caught my breath. Here was no flash of pinkish-red like the flow of blood in the rays of a full moon, no dancing glitter of warmth, no leap of liberated flame—but instead a dull inanimate thing that pulsed no reflected light as I took it from its velvet bed with fingers that trembled, and brought it closer to my unbelieving eyes.

A medical friend once told me that it was probably impossible for a healthy heart completely to miss a beat. I am convinced he was in error; for I am equally certain that then and there mine did. Not one beat, but several. For Mac had announced the truth, and that which I held in my hand was nothing but a duplicate of the king of rubies cut from glass. In a tumultuous wave the consequences of my loss inundated me, and the thing fell from my relaxed fingers and rolled outward over the floor, made a broad revolution, a smaller one, then another, and fell, dead but mocking, in a bar of wintry sunlight. I stood, transfixed with what to me was an overwhelming tragedy, bent forward, gasping, and staring at it. I felt the cold sweat break through the pores of my forehead, and then a great numbness, an unfathomable despair. I stepped blindly backward until the hollows behind my knees came in contact with a chair, and into it I fell like a man unexpectedly tripped.

"Good Lord! What's the matter with you?" Mac demanded, instantly recognizing the depths of my distress.

"Mac," I mumbled, "I've been robbed! I don't know when or where; but I had the Samarkand—there in that case—carried it always inside my shirt, night and day—never let it get away from me, even when I slept and—now it's gone!"

He was all solicitude, for he was not only my personal friend but a man of infinite sympathy and profound understanding. He put his hand on my shoulder, seeming to tower above me as I sat, collapsed, in his office chair.

"Man—man! Pull yourself together. I understand what you feel. It's rotten luck! Here, wait and I'll get you a jolt to pull you up."

He went to his desk and brought from a drawer a flask of brandy, poured the metal cup full, and I gulped it, hot and raw, was half-strangled, and momentarily forgot a mental anguish in the throes of physical struggling for breath. He picked the imitation gem from the floor, examined it curiously, and slowly put it back in the case, looking at me thereafter as if questioning my sanity, soberness, or capacity for blundering. Then he shook his head and said, as if answering a question addressed to himself: "No, it's not like you ever to have been mistaken as to what was in that case, or to have lost it through carelessness, or to have been fooled by a trick. You had it, and—"

"It's gone!" I finished the sentence for him, and somehow of a sudden became conscious of outer sounds, of the feet of men in the corridor walking across concrete floors, of the dull rumble of the city outside, of the clanging of car bells and the honking of automobiles impatiently threading their way through the downtown traffic.

"Got any idea how, or where?" his voice pulled me back to sensibility.

"Not an idea. Not one! Don't see how it could have happened," I blurted.

He handed me the imitation and the case. I took them dully and thrust them into my pocket.

"Don't say anything about this, Mac," I requested, and as he nodded his head sympathetically I explained: "I've got to have time to think this over and, as you can understand, the fewer that know anything about it, the better. I can't, right now, remember a single precaution I didn't take; but just the same it looks to me as if I'm worse than down and out."

He grasped my shoulder again.

"No, you're not, Johnny. Get that bee out of your bonnet. You're just taking part of the count. You've got to get up and make a fight of some sort. You must! And if there's anything in the world I can do to help you—well, you know me. You

beat it quietly to some place where you can sit down and think it all over carefully before you see anyone. This is no time for you to make mistakes. If you want me any time out of office-hours, call up my house phone. It's in the book, and day or night, don't hesitate."

I was but little encouraged by his kindliness, yet recognized the wisdom of his advice; and so I went straight to my apartment, where in seclusion, and surrounded by homely familiar objects, I could think undisturbed. And all that afternoon I sat or paced the floor more or less helplessly and hopelessly.

Of one feature I was certain—and this was that the last time that I had opened the case, there in my room in the Amsterdam hotel on the night preceding my departure, it held the real Samarkand. I had neither opportunity nor temptation to look at it on the voyage across, and so impressed with my responsibilities had I been in that crowded cabin that I had actually slept with it clutched in my hand, and as an additional precaution had not doffed my underwear. All my thought narrowed down to the possibilities of its having been stolen during the last night I had spent in Amsterdam.

I couldn't conceive how the theft had been effected. But I couldn't imagine how it could have been stolen at any other time.

The appalling part of my meditations revolved about the loss to Mr. Wakefield, that kindly, liberal man who had so fully trusted me, and who stood ready and waiting so magnificently to reward me for my participation in an enterprise that would seem shady and questionable to any others than we two, who knew all the circumstances. I felt as if I had not only been instrumental in a great loss to him through some delinquency of which I wasn't aware, but was suddenly fearful that he might suspect me of having betrayed his confidence—been careless, or worse yet, yielded to temptation and become a thief!

I never dreaded an interview in my life so much as the one that I went to have with him that evening after telephoning for an appointment and asking him to make certain that he could be alone. I felt beaten, humiliated, despairing and hesitant, as I forced myself, finally, to ring his doorbell.

I entered with dragging steps like a man in acute illness. He arose to meet me with his hand outstretched and a warm smile of greeting. He must have read the loss in my attitude. His face suddenly betrayed perplexity, then alarm.

"What is it? What has happened? Something is wrong," he said quickly, as the door closed and we were left alone.

"The very worst," I said. "I have been robbed of the Samarkand! I, who in all the years, in all the trips, after buying and caring for millions of dollars' worth of jewels for others have never lost a single one, have lost the rarest of all and—I can't for the life of me tell when, how or where it happened! I never even knew it was gone until today. If you think I have been negligent, or am a thief—"

"Nonsense!" he said. "You're unstrung. You're all shot to pieces. I know men, and I know you, and all about you. Get those things out of your mind at once. Now sit down and tell me the whole story."

THERE was such complete trust, such kindliness, such readiness to listen and forgive in his words and attitude, that I felt my lips tremble with emotion and relief, and for a minute I couldn't utter a sound. With that splendid understanding of humanity that had made him great, he merely reached over and patted my knee and waited for me to regain self-control. In that gentle reassurance I was instantly brought back to words and felt that I could talk freely, that I should be believed—could talk as to a very old and trusted friend, rather than to one for whom I had lost something that to him was beyond price. I told him every detail within my knowledge, even to my meeting with the Russians, and he sat listening, now and then, but seldom, asking a question, and calmly and thoughtfully considering all I had to offer. And then for some moments we sat quietly, he with his eyes fixed abstractedly in vacancy, and I waiting for him to speak.

"I can't see where you neglected any precaution for the protection of the stone," he said at last. "And like you, I can't but believe that it must have been taken in the hotel; for it seems incredible, from what you say, that it could, or would, have been taken by any of the men who occupied the same cabin in the ship. You are positive they were all prominent business men?"

"Certain of it. The president of the American Chamber of Commerce in Holland who came across with the party, knew

them all personally, and told me of their wealth, influence and prominence."

"That narrows it still further to the hotel and your last night's stay there," he agreed with my own deductions. "Now, those Russians—ummh! By the way, were there any Japanese prospecting around there in Amsterdam?"

"I met but one Japanese since I left New York," I said. "He made the voyage across on the same ship and stopped at the same hotel; but he was merely a student."

He turned as I spoke, his eyes slowly widened, and he leaned forward slightly and waited until I had finished.

"What name did he use? Did he speak both English and French? What did he look like?" he demanded in sequence without giving me time to reply to any separate question.

He listened in that same tense attitude while I told him of Takiyamo and also of what I had regarded as the trivial incident in the hotel, and then suddenly stood up and walked backward and forward across the room, frowning, and considering. He stopped in front of me and suddenly began rapping out instructions.

"You may have a long and useless chase ahead of you," he said, "but I shall pay all and any expense if you are gone one or five years! You must take the first possible boat back to Amsterdam, and if you think it advisable, call in the aid of detectives, make them move fast, and run down that Japanese as well as those Bolshevists.

"But remember it's the Jap you are to go after first of all, and quickest. The chap you know as Takiyamo was undoubtedly a man who had been a servant here in my house, a man who on several occasions I thought addicted to eavesdropping, who moved about too quietly to suit me, who I thought was very much too inquisitive, and who saved me the annoyance of discharging him by quitting without a moment's leave on the morning after I bade you good-by! He's the only man I know of who might be deft enough, and clever enough, to rob you of the Samarkand on the night before you sailed. It's up to you to get him and to get that ruby. You can do it if anyone can, and if you can't—well, it's bad luck for both of us; but in the meantime I'm backing you."

This intriguing mystery-tale heightens in interest in the next installment. Don't miss it!

Seven on the Red

By

JOSEPH BLETHEN

Illustrated by William Molt

"IT would be a pious idee," said Tahoe Tim, my old sourdough friend, as we settled in our big wicker rockers on his Lake Tahoe cabin porch for our after-supper smoke, "to come an' confide your ambitions to me once that there Bohemian Club thirst o' yours starts on another rampage. This here simple an' child-like trust which you reposes in me might lead you to go samplin' my new batch o' moonshine which the same I hasn't had time to finish yet. I has to run her through the machine once more and take the dynamite out o' her some. Because, if you contemplate suicide like that, I sure prefers you to elect some other executioner for yourself an' not go wastin' my new stuff none. An' if I aint here when your insides starts to git all arid thataway, jess you holler for Fat Loo an' tell him you craves to meet up with my last bottle of the old stuff that's on the top shelf in his kitchen cupboard. An' even with them precautions, brother, you does well to play your hand careful like. Fat Loo, bein' only a Chink, considers this here suicide enterprise as bein' plumb personal an' private, an' not to be restrained by no descendant of the great Confucius. An' at that, I reckon my finished product is a darn sight safer'n some o' the stuff your bootlegger friend unloads on you down in the city."

I was content to ignore the old sourdough's little gibe at my pet delinquency, and to take his words as a friendly bit of caution. After four years of occasional

A vivid tale of Tahoe Tim and of wild days and wild ways in distant Alaska—by the talented author of the "Hiram Inkweller" stories.



"'It's a hunch,' says Red, 'a hunch from Heaven!'"

acquaintance with Mountain Dew as fabricated by these careful veterans of the Sierras, I still retained the sight of both eyes, and "packed" a good digestion. Besides, on this particular evening, as we sat on Tahoe's cabin porch, I was altogether too contented and comfortable to sustain my side of any verbal rumpus.

BEFORE us Lake Tahoe nestled in her mountain cradle, softly mirroring one of her most gorgeous sunsets, a sunset hung high on the Nevada Hills across the lake eastward from us—eastward in fact, not merely in my fancy, for at that moment we were sitting on the California side of the lake, on a promontory which forms the southern border of Meeks Bay, and with our backs to the Sierras, behind which, to the west, the sun was just descending. I chose to ignore Tahoe Tim's suggestion of caution and to invoke his attention to contemplation. I accordingly waved my hand at the lake.

"Where in this world, Tahoe," said I, "will you find a more gorgeous lake than that? And what other lake in the world furnishes two sunsets at each and every performance? A little curtain raiser in the west to be in accordance with tradition and geography, and then the main performance on the hills to the east, where you can look at it without having old Sol bat you in the optic nerve. Some lake, I'll say!"

"Yeah," agreed Tahoe Tim, twisting his chair around until we were two faces east, and both contemplating that chromatic ecstasy. "I've been thinking about her all day—this here Lake Tahoe, I mean. She's so crazy thataway I'm plumb fond of her. Fact is, in more ways'n one, she's jess like me. Contrary. Plumb disgraceful thataway in bein' peculiar like a Chinaman. She does everything backwards. Hands you a sunset in the *east* and a sunrise in the *west!* A cowboy would call her locoed. Us carekeepers what lives here for keeps, all year roun' from hell to Christmas, knows she's just plain crazy, and us, we knows she don't mean no harm by them upside-down didoes. She's all right for a friendly lake till some squall hits her, or till you goes and falls into the drink, then it's 'good-by, Susanna, don't sit up none fer me!' Must be some secret she's hidin' down in that big hole, for she never lets a man come back up to tell whatever does he find on that long, wet trail. Take, fer instance, that dude fisherman what falls out of his boat down yonder by Rubicon Point. This is ten years ago now, an' he don't send back his new address yet."

If I hadn't known from my many visits to Tahoe Tim's retreat that this placid lake lying yonder in its evening bath of opal was a part of his very life, I might have thought of him as becoming restive, and about to break for the bright lights of moss-grown Barbary Coast. But I knew better, and only wondered what had started the old sourdough off on a facetious physiographical trek. "Maybe," I ventured, trying to match whimsicalities, "the Lady of the Lake liked him so well she kept him down there and married him."

"Maybe so," answered my host. "Locks him up in a nice cozy cave so he can't go out nights none. Maybe you can write her up. This Big Brother fellow that comes on the air every evenin' can sure use her for a bedtime fable."

The old man's pretended disdain for

scribes in general, and for the present scribbler in particular, was not new to me. I could afford to let this additional gibe pass, for right now I could scent a new reminiscence on the fire. And Tim's reminiscences were an unfailing gold mine to me. So I hid behind his reference to his highly prized radio. "By the way, Tahoe, I brought up some new dry-cells for that tin can you call a receiving-set," said I.

" 'Bout time," he growled. "Bunch of kids from Meeks Bay is trampin' over here every night this week an' they plumb wears her out. Aint been able to get a squawk out of her all day."

"Then I'm glad I brought them. But, for myself, I get all the radio I can stand at the Bo Club," I answered. "When the boys can't get a drink they come up in my den and try to get distance. What I want to hear right now is more about this lake. For myself, I don't think she's at all crazy. She's very pretty and very well-behaved. And as for sunsets in the east, anybody with any sense can see the reason. Meeks Bay is in a pocket, and the hills to the west are higher than those over east on the Nevada side. It follows naturally that—"

"She's so plumb crazy she's captivatin'," interrupted Tahoe Tim, waving aside my attempted explanation. "She's so cold in the summer she freezes the propeller blades off'm them speed launches, an' she's so warm in the winter all us carekeepers goes in every Saturday night to save heatin' up our open-air bathrooms. Worse'n that, the fool thing is so high up in these mountains it takes two pailfuls of water out of her to soak down one dirty sock."

"Sure," I agreed, falling in step with his exaggerations. "It's a prohibition lake. It's so high up in the world that even the water is dry."

"You said it, brother. An' on hot days when I wants to sit here in the shade an' be amused by them broadcastin' outfits there aint a set on Tahoe will work, but take it on moonlit nights, when Loupo and me wants to go out an' commune with our ancient memories, the darn things work so good we can hear 'em doin' murder in Chicago. Tantalizin', actin' up thataway."

"The wonder is to me," I ventured, "that anybody ever found it—this lake, I mean. Tucked away off up here in the mountains!"

"Easy enough, young fellow. She's hitched on to the top end of Truckee River. Has been ever since she was first made. Some sourdough, prospectin' upstream, runs bang into her. An' bein' he wants more river and less puddle, he cusses right out. 'Ta-*hoe* with this thing,' says he. 'She's went an' bit off my river. Whatinell will I do with her now I've found her?' "

"Well, what did he do with her, Tim?" I asked, keenly relishing the old miner's inventions.

"Lets her lay right where he finds her, you bloomin' *chechahco!* That there is 'long about 'forty-nine or 'fifty, when every gulch in this region has a bunch of prospectors fussin' around in it. After while he builds himself a raft and floats himself over to the Nevada side. It's him that smells out the Comstock Lode."

"Same chap?"

"Same starvin' sourdough. An' that's what I started to talk about: this here hole in the top of the Sierras right in front of us, that quartz over in them hills on the Nevada side, all them placer diggin's back yonder in the 'forty-nine country, an' also why this Lake Tahoe is so plumb contrary. I gets her all figgered out jess lately."

So! My story was fast approaching. I hid my smiles of anticipation behind a freshly-lit cigarette.

"Old Bill was over from McKinney's," continued the old Klondiker. "We has a argument. Maybe Bill, he knows somethin' about the sea, him bein' a' old whaler like that, but when it comes to gold-minin', he aint so much."

WITH much pretended disdain was this said. I wanted to agree with my host, just by way of encouragement. But diplomacy bade me keep silent. Old Bill, winter carekeeper at McKinney's and blood brother to every trout in the lake, was also a flowing fountain to my thirsty pen. So I merely observed, tactfully, that an old salt was likely to get into deep water when he climbed a mountain.

"Old Bill, he opines," continued the veteran of the Yukon gulches, "that this here hole in the rocks, which the same now holds this crazy lake in her hands, is made by a earthquake 'way back in the centuries sometime. He holds plumb stubborn thataway that a nice little shake comes along and rips these mountains wide open, like a big storm might open up the planks of a old windjammer. Earthquake nothin'! I hears me some geology talks broadcasted by General Electric and the University

of California, Berkeley, and then I sits me out here in the shade and puts my wisdom to work. That there hole out there, all full o' lake, aint made by no fallin' apart of what's now these great states of California and Nevada. No secession stuff up here in these ancient hills. No, brother, not so. This here piece of high-line dredgin' is sure done by a crazy-headed volcano what works overtime one evenin' till she gets plumb overheated. Then she blows herself up, dog-sled and dugout, an' she don't leave nothin' but a hole full o' smoke. An' then all them little mountain streams that is flowin' an' ripplin' an' plungin' north an' south an' east and west, they has to turn right around and flow back till this here hole is filled plumb up an' is spillin' out into what's now that Truckee River we talks about. Why wouldn't a lake go crazy in the head when she all of a sudden finds herself poured into a big lot of nothing 'way up here where a volcano once was?"

"Clear enough," I replied, trying to picture for myself that ancient seismic suicide. "But where, old top, does the placer gold of 'forty-nine come in?"

"She don't come *in,* you scribblin' idiot! She comes *out.* She's smelted in that there volcano's fiery furnace. Thousands of billions of tons of gold quartz is burned up jess like *that,* and the pure flakes o' gold is scattered in these hills, to be washed down the gulches by the rains of hell-an'-gone years."

"And remained right there to be discovered by the hell-an'-gone argonauts of 'forty-nine," I finished, glad of an opportunity to encourage him. "Well, you ought to know, Tahoe. You were born in a Bret Harte gold-camp, you grew up in these hills, and you made your pile in the Klondike. I'm surprised that old Bill ever dared debate the thing with *you!*"

"I'm sure glad he goes an' does it thataway, the darned old liar! Boy and man, I'm livin' around this here Lake Tahoe most of my life. Even on the Yukon, as you knows about, I am called 'Tahoe Tim' by all the boys. But it aint till Bill gets me riled a couple o' months ago like I'm tellin' you that I tunes in on this University Extension stuff and gets me my dope."

"And it proves something else," I added; "something I've often wondered about. Now I know why none of you old California prospectors ever found the mother lode. Your friend, the volcano, just naturally rose up and blasted that lode to smithereens!"

"Yeah, most of it, brother. Howsomever, some little offshoots of the mother is left over, like the Comstock, right over yonder, and Gold Hill, an' some more of them quartz propositions scattered about these here gulches. Just enough is left to show a thinkin' man what might be if the world don't go an' blow up like that. And it's the same way in life, which maybe some day you young fellows goes an' discovers for yourselves. You sees something jess ahead yonder that you wants. Somethin' you is lookin' for, for a long, long time. An' you gets all set to take it, when *whang!*—the world blows up again! Blows the thing right out o' your hand an' you sets around and watches while another party walks off with it. Yeah. Volcanoes an' wimmen—jess alike. Blow up while you're lookin' right at 'em—an' some other prospector hits the pay! Yeah—same thing!"

The old sourdough became silent, and I, too, sank into such a stillness that I could hear the whispering hiss of my own cigarette. Many tales he had told me of his Klondike days—tales told to me only because of the friendship that had started away up there in the Yukon country when I, a clumsy wanderer, had stumbled into his cabin to nurse back to life a badly frostbitten foot. In general, I knew the continuity of his life: his childhood in a mining town, his boyhood in the lumber camps of these mountans, his futile years of prospecting in these very hills, his later heartbreaking ventures in Alaska, his final gorgeous strike in the Klondike, and his ultimate retirement to this cabin—his fortune locked in the safekeeping of a trust company—with Loupo, his old husky teamleader, as his only companion. But in none of those tales of his wanderings had he ever linked a woman's name with his own.

THROUGH my mind, as I sat on his cabin porch that night, there flashed the line: "Alone we sprawl with Memory's bulging noons"—and I thrilled with the hope that at last I should be trusted with the story of the Lost Honeymoon. And as I waited, hopefully, Loupo came slowly out of the gathering shadows, mounted to the porch, and sprawled sulkily at his master's feet. Here they were, man and dog, trail-broke and true, fellow-mushers of an hundred wildernesses, now

holed-up to idle lonesomely through the tempered winter of their last years. The picture was complete. . . . . I waited. There would be a new story out of his crowded past.

"I GETS me a letter today," he resumed, finally, "an' it sure sends me back over a old trail. It's from Red, an' this time he aint got a squeal left in him. It's in there. You kin read it tomorrer."

This *was* news, and I sat up a bit straighter. Red Gleason had been Tahoe's partner in the Alaskan days. The two had fought together through many disappointments, and then had finally located Number Eighteen above Discovery on one of the Klondike creeks, worked it, and returned outside with the fortune divided equally between them. But with their parting, Red had lost something which his easy good nature much needed: Tahoe Tim's calm, balancing philosophy. Red's business ventures soon drained his fortune and there had followed many times through the years when Tahoe's voluntarily divided income was all that stood between Red and helpless poverty. And Red had always blamed the partner for locking the principal beyond reach.

"Seems like," continued the old one, "nothin' I ever does in them days pleases Red. Leastwise, nothin' that he knows about at the time. Me, I am always holdin' him down, headin' him off, and trompin' on him. You remembers that first winter o' the Klondike rush when your newspaper sends you up there and you comes in on us with your frozen foot? Well, we is just prospectin' then—hangin' around the main Klondike strike an' borin' into them benches hopin' to find that the pay-dirt aint all down in the creek bed. Well, after you left us, an' went on down river to pursue them investigations of yours, we jess starves out. So we quits our bench one day an' goes to work for wages right smack on Number One below on the Klondike proper. Well sir, we sees so much gold dust that spring we gets plumb played out loadin' it into Dawson. Soon's we git money enough for grub, we hits out for ourselves again, goin' this time over in the Tanana country where we hits a pocket or two in a creek near Fairbanks.

"But them pockets aint so plentiful—an' pretty soon we're over on another creek near by an' workin' again for wages. An' one day here comes a *chechahco* doggin' it out from Fairbanks an' offers us a thousand cold for our claim which we has jess left. Red is for grabbin' it quick, but I says no. I smells a mice in the way that sport stampedes it 'way out from town just to buy our location right. Why don't he go jump it, we bein' gone like that? Somethin' doin' over there, sez I, an' he knows that to jump that claim sure spells warfare. Then when he offers Red five hundred for his half, an' then me, I is plumb sure there is a whole bunch of rats rampagin' around the cupboard. Red is for grabbin' the five hundred, an' I has one hell of a time sittin' on him till I gets me the dope straight. Red always is believin' in hunches, you remember, an', because this hurry-up bird from town has red hair, Red says the hunch is for him to take his red brother's tip and sell. Finally I gets Red to agree that we all three turns his red brother's dog team around an' all hands goes mushin' back over them hills to see what's what.

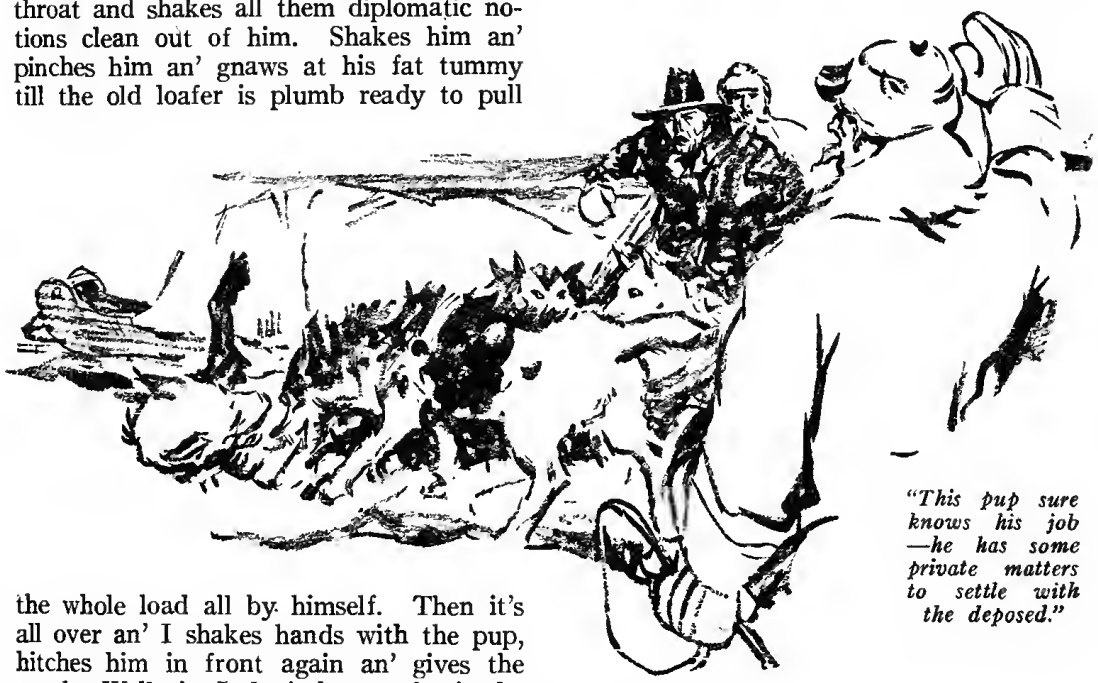
"Well, I'm the only real dog driver in the outfit, so I takes me them huskies in hand. An' this is where I first meets up with this Loupo dog, him bein' jess a pup then an' bein' hitched back next the sled. First day out I studies him an' I see me he's a born leader while this big dog what is hitched ahead is an old sulk, which that same malemute is plumb wearin' out my whip. So next mornin' I hitches the old party back next to the plow an' I puts Loupo up in Station Number One. Right then the whole team lays down on me, an' to make it worse, Red and his town friend starts to pull the merry ha-ha on my dog wisdom. The whole team, did I say? Well, not exactly. This pup Loupo gimme a look that said somethin', so I jess slipped off his harness an' confided to him that here an' now is the chance for him to win a grubstake for life."

"And he did," I affirmed heartily, not a bit ashamed that I was looking down at the old musher with more than a slight mist in my eyes.

"Somewhat," agreed the old sourdough. "Loupo, he takes them loafers in hand one by one. One dog at a time, but oh, brother!

"The town fellow starts yellin' that I am murderin' his pets, an' he's goin' to shoot the pup—when I winds my whip around his dude wrist a lot an' gives him somethin' *real* to think about! Well sir, by the time this pup Loupo is ready to call on that

there old sulk back next the sled, the returns has become a landslide for the new candidate. The lazy cur jess rolls over an' puts all four feet up in token he craves a armistice in these hostilities. But this pup he sure knows his job. He has some private matters to settle with the deposed. So he jess grabs that old skunk by the throat and shakes all them diplomatic notions clean out of him. Shakes him an' pinches him an' gnaws at his fat tummy till the old loafer is plumb ready to pull



"This pup sure knows his job —he has some private matters to settle with the deposed."

the whole load all by himself. Then it's all over an' I shakes hands with the pup, hitches him in front again an' gives the word. Well sir, I don't know who is the most respectful, Red's new town friend, or his lazy pets, or Red himself. In ten minutes Loupo has turned a bunch of loafin' huskies into a dog-team that can yank the bottom out from under Mount McKinley an' like it, and I has showed certain parties that I am in no frame of mind to hear any back talk. An' we gets home next day an' finds that the boys has hit pay on the next claim to ours an' that chances are our claim is worth more diggin' around in."

"And you bought Loupo right then?"

"Right on the spot—the fellow on the next claim lendin' me the money. Loupo's been with me ever since. Yeah. An' four weeks later we sold that claim for a hundred thousand cash!"

The wanderings of their trail from this, their first strike, was well known to me. Red Gleason had romped into Fairbanks and had rioted there till the bright lights and the roulette tables had taken his all. Then Tahoe Tim had gone to him and again divided the money remaining in the partnership purse. Not once, but again and again, until the whole fortune was gone, and the two were back again in the Klondike country, prospecting in the upper gulches of Bonanza. That, I have often thought, should have been Red Gleason's lesson. But I have come slowly to realize that a lesson had never meant anything to that erratic pilgrim. Unable to profit by his mistakes, he was through life as much a pensioner on Tahoe's calm strength as was the dog at the old sourdough's feet.

"Red never thanks me for that little piece of high financin'," continued my host. "Gettin' him fifty thousand instead of five hundred only goes to his head like. An' after it is all gone, he blames me for not lockin' it up in bonds an' things an' holdin' him down to the income."

"Yes," I agreed, "and when, later on, you did just that very thing after your big strike, what did he do?" I was a bit sarcastic, but I couldn't help it.

"Sells his bonds from day to day an' bites off everything them get-rich-quick fellows can think up," answered Tahoe Tim. "An' then turns around an' jumps on me because I has this time locked my stuff up tight an' throwed away the key. Pretends he's mad all these years. Writes me hot letters cussin' me from hell to breakfast for ever makin' out that trust deed. But just where'd we all be if I hadn't 'a' done it?"

"Very wise thing," I agreed. "And odd,

too—odd that a rich Klondiker should turn his back on the lure of more, and lock himself into the protection of the safest men in the financial world."

"Well, I dunno. Not so odd. Just *my* one big hunch that it is up to me to look out for all of us—an' that there trust company down on Market Street is sure the safe way. There is Loupo, an' me, an' Red, an'—an' Red's wife."

Wife? Red Gleason's *wife?* During the months in which I had been a frequent visitor to Tahoe Tim in this retreat on the mountain lake, and in the previous chance crossings of our trails in other places, he had never before mentioned the woman. I was hearing of her for the first time.

I knew that the old sourdough had divided his income through the years with his good-natured and irresponsible partner, but I had pictured that partner as nesting alone somewhere on the edge of the Arizona desert, answering the call of that wonderland as naturally as old Tahoe had crawled back to his beloved hills. But I had not known that another had shared Red's improvident life.

"Well, now that it's all over thataway," went on the old man, musingly, "I has this to comfort me: I know my hunch that time is right. If I ever meets up with her two daughters I can look 'em right in the eye. It is my trust company hunch saves the money to help bring 'em up. An' when Red an' me has passed over, they gets the interest money for life."

"All over?" I repeated eagerly. "What's all over, Tahoe?"

"I'm tellin' you," he answered, evasively. "For once Red has to say somethin' decent in his letter about what I goes and does one time. Tomorrer, as I says jess now, you reads it for yourself. But now I wises you up so's you kin have the dope."

AS if I wasn't burning to be "wised up"! But I knew it was my cue to play a silent part, and so I waited, wondering what new trail of reminiscence we were now to follow.

"This here little blow-up I'm tellin' you about," he began, after refilling the old pipe, "happens when Red and me is sittin' pretty on Eighteen. You knows all about that claim, how we works her for a while an' then we leaves her as a false alarm, and how Kate Rendo, the dance-hall woman from Barbary—Mrs. Ben Carter she is when she quits dancin'—keeps pourin' her money down a prospect hole in Nineteen, jess next claim above us, an' finally hits pay 'way down so deep it's the wonder of the whole country? Yeah, sure you do. I've sure told you about her a lot. An' when she hits it thataway, ol' Kate jess lets out the glad yell an' brings all us upper creek sourdoughs stampedin' back to our extravagant riches. Jess as I tells you often.

"Well, when this particular rumpus I'm tellin' you about finally cuts loose, it's now two winters after that glad time, an' Red, an' Loupo, an' me, we're so rich we're plumb worried about it. Kate Rendo's lost kid has showed up, him bein' that minin' engineer chap, an' he's runnin' old Nineteen for his mother, an' showin' all us up-creek sourdoughs some inside dope on how the big fellows gets the most out of a claim once they busts the lid off an' sees her pannin' out pretty; an' he's so all-fired human all the time, we up-creek owners pulls a party for him at The Forks which the same mighty near stops up the main Klondike River with our dead soldiers. Not that Kate's kid takes too much thataway. He's a quiet cuss that can take a drink or two an' stop before he loses the balance of his shootin' hand. But there is a lot of the boys that is pent up a whole lot till they has to rip the roof off'm somethin', an' The Forks does well enough for one night, bein' as how that particular night is twenty-three hours less one minute in length and duration.

"Well, along about midnight, when the sun is way 'round by the South Pole, an' not worryin' none about the Yukon country, the kid an' me figures we has enough, an' seein' as how no one will miss us out of the general mee-lee, we slips out to take a nice long walk home in the moonlight—Yukon moonlight, you know, shinin' on what that scribblin' fellow friend o' yours calls the White Silence. But that she aint so silent jess now we finds out right pronto, for here's Red outside, leanin' up against the side of the roadhouse, an' talkin' to himself.

" 'It's a hunch,' says Red when he sees us. 'A hunch from Heaven! An' me, I goes to Dawson right now an' plays her pretty.' "

" 'Dawson is fifteen miles from here, old top,' says Laurie, the kid, kinder playful. 'Better you takes a bottle along in your pocket, or maybe your hunch runs out.'



"The old party is plugged by a flyin' bullet meant for Red."

" 'This here is no alcoholic hunch,' says Red. An' he hugs the kid out of his pure excess of joy. 'This here hunch comes to me straight from this Aurora Borealis you-all can see still shinin' in the sky. She sure shoots me the inside dope!'

" 'An' what,' asks Laurie Carter, holdin' Red out o' the snow, 'might it be which our midnight friend Miss Aurora has confided to you thataway?' Only, you understand, the kid uses the same kind o' college talk I gets over this here radio, an' not the flavor us sourdoughs is used to, when free and untrammeled."

"I understand," said I. "Young Carter was a university man. Tell me the rest."

"Yeah. But you aint heard nothin' yet, as your fellow what writes them 'mammy songs' says in his talkin' machine records. The kid an' me, we both has to go to work on Red somethin' drastic to get the straight of it—but here she is: This here Aurora party, it bein' a clear night an' cold enough to freeze hell out o' the deal forever, is sure shootin' pretty. For seven times she shoots a fan in the air, the said wide, spread-out fans o' light havin' seven long red points. An' then, for fear Red hasn't got it straight, she shoots her midnight randango seven times again, an' then keeps up this midnight panjorama till she shoots seven sets of seven flares of this seven-ribbed red fan. Whereby Red absorbs the hunch that he's to mush to Dawson pronto, stampede into the biggest gamblin' house an' burst her wide open by stackin' the U. S. Mint seven times on the red."

At this point I indulged in a quiet laugh, for, be it known, my sympathies were for the moment entirely with one Red Gleason. I have seen the Aurora Borealis dance in those Yukon skies when I was so cold that at every breath my lungs pricked with an hundred jabbing needles, but all I ever made out of it was a sense of awe at one of God's wonders. To read a telegraphic secret out of that message from the Unknown appealed to me. "And did he go play it?" I demanded.

"He does, with half o' Dawson watchin' him, an' the other half plumb bogged down, seein' as they can't get in the place, she's so jammed."

"And he broke the bank?"

"Not so's to hurt it, brother. This here roulette layout somehow has lightnin' rods up against them clairvoyant hunches. No, Red don't break no bank, but he bumps into a bad shootin' scrape, is seven weeks gettin' out o' jail, an' then comes down bang with seven kinds of pneumonia. Also, an' thereby, he runs plumb into matrimony, which is whereof I'm relatin'."

"I see," said I. "She was his nurse. Very pretty Yukon romance."

"Not a nurse regular, but she sure stands by Red in that fracas. An' this is right where I gets into the party. Yeah. It is like this: This girl has jess come in from outside with her father, her mother bein' already in the next world. They is nice farmer people, an' they aims to start a greenhouse an' all alone by their two selves, prove that the Yukon country can raise its own garden truck. Well, the old party is lookin' on from the crowd while Red is playin' his hunch, an' when Red an' the house-man gets to arguin' with their guns—an' before anyone can stop 'em, the old party is plugged by a flyin' bullet that is meant for Red. He's sure plugged sufficient, is this old *chechahco,* an' right then he mushes up yonder where they has flowers bloomin' perpetual, an' don't need no greenhouses! An' so, Red bein' locked up in jail till the Mounted gets the whole thing straight, I hustles into town, sees to the plantin' of the deceased, an' gets Kate Rendo—Mrs. Carter, I mean—to take the girl home to her nice Dawson bungalow, an' mother her till we all can get our heads in one place an' think it over. Old Kate does a good job of it, only she lets me see the girl about twice too often. First thing I knows, I'm in love for fair, an' walkin' around on my ear."

SLUMPING down in my chair, I tried to keep my thoughts from running away from the slowly unfolding drama. And I could very well realize that old Tahoe Tim had once been young, and that there might have been—

"This here youngster turns out to be some sport," continued the old miner. "Ruth is her name—an' she's gentle and shy, jess like that sounds. She's a blonde, with a lot of gold hair racin' down over her shoulders like the waters in old White Horse rapids, an' warm blue eyes like them Yukon wild flowers in the gorges below Circle. No wonder us forlorn sourdoughs gets all choked up when we stands aroun' lookin' at her. . . . . Well, what does she do, bein' left a orphan like that? Why, she ups an' drags old Kate right down to the headquarters of the Northwest Mounted Police an' tells Red she don't hold it against him none that her father gets plugged thataway at his Aurora Borealis party. An' Red, lookin' at the poor kid standin' there tryin' to comfort *him,* he jess naturally bogs down an' weeps, an' then the little blonde beauty she weeps, an' old Kate she weeps, an' the red-coated Mounted, what's on guard, he gets powerful busy studyin' the Yukon scenery out the window. An' right there, I reckon, is where it all starts, only me, I don't wise up to it till later.

"Well, she sure is a busy session for me, that time, me jumpin' around like I am, like a hungry malemute after a fat rabbit. Me, I'm jumpin' out to Eighteen to watch the dumps, an' jumpin' back to this here Dawson lawyer to keep him on the job helpin' Red, then jumpin' over to Kate's cabin an' framin' with her for the little blonde's comfort, an' all the time the winter she's colder'n a section from a petrified iceberg. Everything's against me, even to my fool tongue, for every time I gets me alone with Ruth, I freezes up an' can't speak a word. An' while I'm helpless like that she goes every day to cheer Red up a lot and he, the lucky dog, can talk a blue streak all day long till the Mounted calls time on 'em.

"Well, after seven weeks of this kind of insanity, we gets some sunshine. The colonel in command is back on the job and takes up the case. He's a wise old bird and he figures that she's a private shootin' party with everybody present takin' their own chances. So he deports the marble spinner back to the Barbary Coast, an' sentences Red to stay out of Dawson for six months. Fair enough, only this last Red fails to do through no fault of his own, 'cause he no more'n hits our shack when he comes down with pneumonia, pleurisy, the influenza, an', the doctor says, somethin' else that sure moves him to call her a case of lung trouble. Well, you know, brother, lung trouble in a sixteen-by-twenty-four Yukon shack in midwinter aint no tea-party, so Kate Rendo romps out with her big sled—horses, mind you—an' bundles him down to the hospital in Dawson. You know, the one them Sisters is runnin' up on the hill by the big landslip. Then Kate goes to the colonel an' explains things, an' the colonel man, he hands Red over to her on parole, an' she an' Ruth chases over to the hospital an' starts dividin' time as nurses. Between the two of 'em, old Kate richer'n hell, an' little Ruth prettier'n a' angel's pet photograph, they sure makes that far away hospital famous. An' when Red gets well an' goes over to Kate's big wickiup in Dawson

proper to recover his strength a lot, us up-creek owners, we passes the hat an' we sure dents that Mother Superior's desk with a bunch o' nuggets. But, meantime, there's somethin' else bustin' loose.

"It falls like this: Red is at old Kate's Dawson bungalow about two weeks now an' is comin' on fine. Me, I'm there to dinner this night with the family, an' I'm plannin' to stay all night at the Grand Hotel in town. Well, old Kate orders Red to bed early, an' she an' Laurie, an' Laurie's wife that is to be, all mushes down town to a doin's at the Yukon Club—an' I'm left alone by the open fire with this Ruth party. Seems like she's prettier'n ever, an' all this trouble has turned the girl more into a woman. Well, right then I takes my nerve in my hands an' I makes out to propose to her, an' I no sooner does it than I sees that I'm shootin' our quiet little fireside party all full o' holes. She acts kind o' startled when I makes my put-in, jess like as if she'd pulled a big gamblin' debt down on her sudden-like an' she don't know how in hell she can pay out, an' me, I'm sittin' there feelin' like I am killin' her old father all over again. 'Oh, Tim,' says she, 'I didn't know! Oh, Tim, I'm so sorry.' Yeah. Jess like that she says it. Sorry about *me!*"

LOUPO let out a human-sounding whimper of sympathy, and getting up, he laid his old grizzled head in Tim's lap. I managed to sit up straight, but in the dark I swallowed hard.

"It's jess like I says earlier to you, brother," continued the old man. "I'm lookin' right at a mountain of gold and, *whang*, she blows up on me! I sees my finish, an' I asks Ruth not to think of me, but to come clean an' tell me what's on her mind. 'Why, it's Red,' she says, an' me, I could see by the light in her blue eyes that I am lookin' at some other fellow's location papers. 'It's Red. He's so helpless, Tim. He *needs* me. An' you're so strong—we *both* need *you!* But you've done so much, Tim, that I feel dreadfully guilty. Oh, Tim, wont you tell me what I ought to do?'

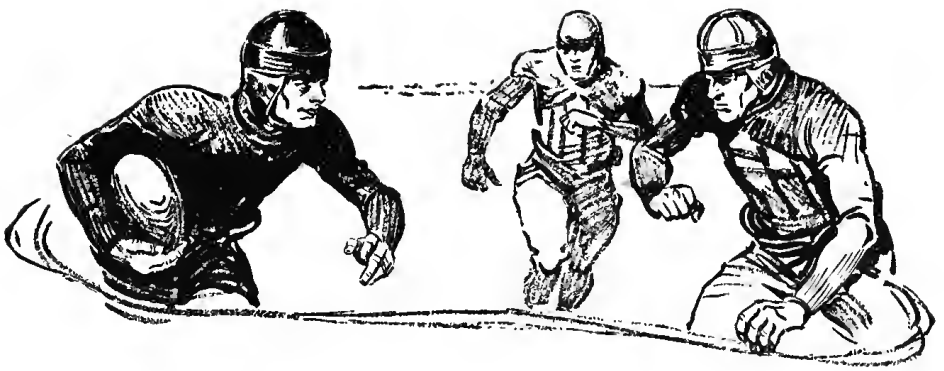
"An' me, I says it's all right for the two of 'em to git married. Leastways, I tries to say it. I aint ever been quite sure what I does say that night. Anyhow, I lies my heart black in the face an' then I sees the smile come back in her blue eyes, an' I wishes 'em well, an' gets myself out in the air. An' then, down by the river ice, I thinks it all out. . . . . It sure looks like a hard trail ahead, but me, I has Loupo, an' sez I: 'Tahoe, we'll mush it to the furthest end o' nowhere.' . . . . Right there I figures she says something, this Ruth woman. 'Red needs *me,*' she says, 'an' we both need *you.*' Jess a couple o' helpless kids—an' I sees my duty plenty plain. But I admits when I gets me to my hotel room that night I am a' old man. . . . .

"An' that's why I locks up my dough in this here trust company thing. I has to fix it so we all can eat! An' Red sez in this letter in there that he now savvys it for the first time. An' that aint all. You see, brother, Ruth died last week. . . . . Passes away quiet an' happy, tellin' her husband for the first time that she turns me down for him thataway. An' Red says will I stick, an' forgive him for a lot of his cussedness, 'cause now he's plumb lonesome, too. Yeah—asks me to stick, thataway, jess as if he had to! Don't know me yet, that Red boy, does he, Loupo? Never will, will he, old dog? Just a kid what's never grown up, eh?"

And old Loupo whined again and nuzzled in closer, as I silently picked up a blanket and departed to the seclusion of the hillside shadows, these lines running again through my mind:

"—Yet one thing have we missed, you dog and I;
No children paw your back nor seek my knee.
Alone we wandered through those endless worlds
And lost Youth's right to claim Youth's fruitful mate.
Alone we sprawl with Memory's bulging noons—
While Fancy leads us through lost honeymoons—
My husky."

Crazy was he, this old sourdough? Doing things upside down and contrary to tradition? Yes, clear out of his mind with his intent to do for others! Such a story of hard sense and gentle sacrifice to come out of that passionate caldron that was the Klondike—as crazy and at once as beautiful as this mountain lake that staged her royal sunsets in the east. . . . . Long I sat, blanket-wrapped and alone, by the shimmering waters, the moon-tipped mountains standing sentinel over my musings, and dreamed my own dream of that Lost Honeymoon.



A Pledge Redeemed

The men of St. Andrews were up against the battle of their lives in this stirring story by the author of "Landlocked Wings." You will greatly enjoy the tale of how it was fought and won.

By HOMER KING GORDON

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

ALTHOUGH the college of St. Andrews was only a six-hour journey from his Chicago home, Rodney Stephens had stayed away from it, his alma mater, for twenty-five years. He was going back now, not because he wanted to, but because his son had left him no other alternative.

Jack Stephens had telegraphed:

> DAD:
> This is my last football game. Kathleen is coming. I have told her you would take her to the game. You who taught me football have never seen me play. I want you here more than I have ever wanted anything else. Please forget business and come. Wire me when you will arrive.
>
> JACK.

Business—as he reread the telegram on the train bearing him toward St. Andrews, Rodney Stephens wondered if his son had ever suspected the "business" excuses given in the past were only manufactured alibis.

He wondered if Jack suspected the truth, that he, Rodney Stephens, had been stretched on memory's torture-rack for the past twenty-five years, painfully living over and over again a football game played on the St. Andrews gridiron.

Scattered throughout the world are living monuments whose lives are dedicated to decades of self-imposed penance over something that everyone else has forgotten—or never knew. Rodney Stephens was such a man.

His associates knew him as a lion-hearted business wizard. By nerve and bulldog courage he had built a chain of grain elevators, and through years of lean crops and cyclones he had fought off ruin and made a fortune for himself and for the men who had pledged their faith with him.

In appearance he was a fighter. There was no surplus fat on his tall, powerful body. At forty-five his eyes were as keen as they had been at twenty, and he moved with the same easy athletic grace, for hard work and careful training had kept him in condition.

FOR several years after his graduation from St. Andrews, Rodney Stephens had kept physically fit for a purpose. He had meant to go back, take one more year's work on some pretext and play one more season of football, or at least one more game. In it he planned to wipe out the stigma of that incident in his football

career which had haunted his memory ever since it happened.

When this cherished plan had become impossible, he stayed away entirely. Now it was hard to go back, but to make it easier he had chosen a train that would arrive in St. Andrews well after dark on the evening before the big game. In answer to his son's telegram he had wired not to bother about meeting him as his plans were indefinite, but that he was coming. To further avoid old classmates, who might possibly be on the same train, he took a drawing-room and went into it as soon as the train gates were opened.

As soon as he arrived in St. Andrews he intended taking a taxi to the nearest hotel where he could stay in seclusion until the next morning; then he would telephone Jack and have him bring Kathleen over to the hotel where they could visit and possibly have luncheon. Kathleen would some day be his daughter-in-law. He remembered her only as one of Jack's sandpile playmates.

When the train arrived in St. Andrews, Rodney Stephens tried to be the last passenger off the coach. The station platform was seething with people, but as he stepped down the vestibule steps he heard Jack's voice:

"There he is!"

A lithe young giant plowed through the crowd and grabbed him around the shoulders. "Hullo there, you old war-horse! This is Kathleen, Dad—where in Sam Hill are you, Kath?"

A radiant girl slipped out from behind his son's back and excitedly hugged Rodney Stephens.

"What are you trying to do, Kath?" Jack demanded.

"Kiss him, of course!"

"Did you?"

Rodney Stephens felt himself pulled along through the jam, the girl dragging at one arm and his son at the other.

"I kissed some one!" Kathleen chuckled triumphantly.

"Where's my bag?" Rodney struggled feebly to free himself.

"It's all right," Jack assured him. "I had a couple of scrubs waiting, ready to carry a trunk if you brought one."

"Where are we going?"

The crowd seemed to be falling back as though they had all been waiting for his arrival.

"Here he is!" he heard Jack sing out. *"R-r-r-rah! R-r-r-rah! R-r-r-rah!* Old Rod Stephens! *R-r-r-r-r-rah!"*—some three hundred voices gave him welcome. Then back of them a band began to play the school anthem and the crowd stood hushed, with bared heads.

As the music ceased, a smiling elderly man stepped from an open-topped car hung with the St. Andrews colors. Rodney Stephens' class pennant draped the engine hood.

"Dad, meet Doctor Campbell, President of St. Andrews."

"I wasn't here in your time." The elderly man smiled and offered his hand. "But now I am a part of St. Andrews, and for the college I bid you welcome after a long absence, Mr. Stephens. We are proud of our old traditions and of our old heroes. I think we are now supposed to get into the car," he finished, with a cordiality too sincere to be feigned.

"But I don't understand," Rodney Stephens protested bewilderedly.

"Get in, Dad!" Jack pushed him up to the flag-draped car and shoved him through the door. "You ought to realize by this time that you're the homecoming hero!"

WHEN Rodney was seated by the school president's side Jack jumped in beside the driver and the car slipped in line behind the band.

"Where is Kathleen?" Rodney asked helplessly.

"Oh, she's back there in the mob somewhere." His son waved at the cheering, singing students who marched behind the car. "She'll get a chance at you all tomorrow afternoon, but tonight you belong to the football team. We can't be bothered with a girl tonight. Kath understands."

"It's remarkable how things have changed since you and I were youngsters, isn't it?" President Campbell observed dryly.

"Doctor, is he what you expected?" Jack asked from the front seat.

"In appearance, yes," the elderly professor acknowledged. "But from what Jack and others have told me," he added to Rodney, "I rather expected you to rush off the train steps and charge through the crowd, breathing fire and brimstone and emitting war-whoops."

Jack's happy laugh rang out over the blare of the band.

"We've knocked the wind out of him," he explained joyously. "Dad thought he was slipping in unexpected and unannounced. He hasn't recovered from his reception yet. Just wait—the fire and warwhoops are in him all right!"

"I'm still wondering how you knew when I'd arrive," Rodney Stephens said soberly.

"Why do you think I keep buying candy for your secretary?" Jack laughed. "When she got through buying your railroad tickets she went to the nearest telegraph office and wired me your train number, when it would arrive, what car you would be on, and the letter of your drawing-room. I got her telegram before I got yours."

"It's a reception I don't deserve."

"Nonsense," President Campbell objected gruffly. "My dear Mr. Stephens, you are one of the traditional heroes of our college. You were as famous in your day as Jack is today. It is a privilege to pay homage to real men. The homecoming of you old St. Andrews men is an inspiration to our undergraduates, and to our faculty. I'd even venture to say that many a student who came to meet your train tonight will remember your coming when the football game of tomorrow will be a thing of forgotten history. And the memory of your coming will probably mean much more to them than the memory of anything that might happen on the football field tomorrow."

"No." Rodney Stephens' breath came sharply. "Football means too much. If I thought for an instant you were right, I'd crawl off somewhere and hide."

"Football is no greater than the men who play it," the school president asserted briefly. "And anyway, Mr. Stephens, you can rest assured Jack and I aren't going to let you escape us now."

"I should say not," Jack agreed. "Look at that pile of logs waiting to be touched off! That's only one of your jobs, Dad!"

The gray stone towers of St. Andrews rose before them. Surrounding the vine-clad buildings were the same giant oaks Rodney Stephens had known in his college days. Off to one corner of the campus were the dormitories. Far down the white graveled road past the school chapel loomed the banked rim of the football bowl. To the right was the old gymnasium, and following a custom that had originated even before the time of Rodney Stephens, there in its boulder-lined urn lay the sacred pyre of St. Andrews.

ON the grass-covered slopes of the natural amphitheater surrounding the fire urn were hundreds of students, waiting silently for the beginning of the ceremony. There was no demonstration as Jack and the elderly school president escorted Rodney Stephens to the edge of the gigantic urn. The cheering mob that had followed his car from the railroad station now melted away in silence. Quietly the band took its appointed place.

Almost apologetically, a cornet sounded the pitch note. Then the sacred fire song of St. Andrews swelled from the throats of the assembled hundreds; solemn and beautiful, its majestic rhythm echoed through the giant oaks. When the last note died away, President Campbell stepped forward. His voice rang out clear and strong:

"Men and women of St. Andrews, we have built a bonfire. This pile of deadwood is a pledge. Each one of you has placed your offering upon it—it is our oath of good sportsmanship. Win or lose, by the fagots you have cast upon this pyre, you have sworn to uphold the honor and the tradition of St. Andrews. It is our offering to the memory of the men and women who have made good the name of our college, our heritage.

"According to our traditions, I give this taper to John Stephens, our football captain, that he may have the sacred pyre of St. Andrews fired, on this the eve of our last football game of the season."

THE son of Rodney Stephens took from President Campbell the proffered silver lamp with its flaming oil wick, and faced the assemblage, his voice trembling with pride as he spoke:

"We are honored tonight with the presence of Rodney Stephens, a famous captain of a famous St. Andrews team that will never be forgotten. I can't tell my dad what I think of him before so many witnesses, but I guess he knows that we're all proud of him. If the pledges we have put on this bonfire mean as much to us as the pledge he burned years ago, then maybe St. Andrews will some day be equally proud of us."

He gulped and stopped suddenly, his voice husky.

"Here,"—turning to his father he held out the flickering lamp,—"light it! I'm talked out."

In the hush that followed Rodney Stephens took a pair of gloves from his pocket

and cast them high up on the pile of logs. Then after a moment of hesitation, he held the silver lamp to the sacred pyre. With a roar the flames caught in the dry tinder and leaped heavenward.

Instantly the crowd on the slopes rushed down to the edge of the bonfire, starting a revel that would be continued until late into the night. In the confusion that followed, Rodney Stephens was dragged away. Jack hustled him through a hand-shaking, back-slapping mob blocking their path, to a little roadster parked on a side drive.

Just as they were about to climb into the car they were overtaken by a lumbering, thick-set figure that had chased them from the fire urn.

"Hey there, you old outlaw!" the newcomer puffed. "I want to shake hands with you."

"It's Tim Hawkins," Jack explained under his breath.

Rodney whirled with outstretched hands. "I would never have know you, Tim!"

"Fat an' forty-seven," Tim gasped. "An' when I run I sound like my valves'd blown out. But I come back every year an' try to tell 'em how to play football the way we used to play it."

"How's the leg?" Rodney laughed.

"Sound as a dollar and bigger'n a barrel," Tim chuckled. "How's your ribs?"

"Oh, I wasn't hurt much." In the darkness Rodney Stephens felt himself flushing and a hard lump rose in his throat.

"You can't tell me that!" Tim declared heatedly. "I did all the hollering and he did all the suffering. Don't let him kid you, Jack—he was knocked so flat he couldn't yell."

"He isn't fooling me any," replied Jack, as he came around the car and shook hands.

"Where are you started for?" Tim asked hopefully. "The clubhouse?"

Jack nodded. "I'm afraid we'll have to beat it, too."

"That's all right," Tim rejoined. "I just wanted to shake hands with the old boy before he got out of running distance."

"Can't we take Tim with us?" Rodney proposed.

"No," Tim protested hastily, "I'm going back to the bonfire. I'll see you tomorrow."

"Tim broke his leg in our last game," Rodney explained as they drove off.

"We have all heard about it," was Jack's dry answer.

"What do you mean?"

"Tim never misses an opportunity to tell the story. He is a considerably advertised football martyr. As a matter of fact, didn't he just make his football letter?"

"Yes," Rodney admitted. "But he played for four years on the scrubs, Jack."

"We all give him credit for gameness, Dad," Jack apologized quickly. "But tonight our football team wants to listen to a man who played four years on the varsity."

Rodney did not answer. But as they speeded through the darkness, the resolution he had made as he touched off the football pyre began slipping away.

IN order to escape the noise and excitement which attended the bonfire celebration on the campus, the St. Andrews football team always spent the night before their last big game of the season at a near-by country club.

During the fire-lighting ceremonies the football squad had looked on from the crest of the amphitheater, ready to leave as soon as the fire began to blaze; and they were already at the country club when Rodney and Jack drove up.

Chad Weinert, veteran coach and trainer, was waiting on the veranda steps.

"Well, Rod," he said, affectionately exploring the former St. Andrews star with an experienced finger, "I believe you could still play football! You're a living example of my lectures on what football ought to make out of a man. Come in and be exhibited."

The test Rodney Stephens dreaded came later in the evening, after the introductions were over and the entire football squad had assembled in the big living-room.

"Men," the coach said seriously, "make yourselves comfortable. Old Rod Stephens is going to make you a little talk. But before he begins, I want to tell you something about him. Rod Stephens came to St. Andrews a natural-born football player. He was always in condition. Look at him now—not an ounce of surplus fat! Playing football came to him as naturally as eating and putting on fat comes to some of you fellows. Rod was a quarterback, as you all know. With him on the field running the team I could sit back on the bench and rest easy. Instinctively he knew more football than I did. Whenever I had a hard football problem or job, I called in Rod. He took care of it. Rod only failed me once."

Cold beads of perspiration broke out on Rodney Stephens' brow—he had always suspected that the old coach had known!

"That was in the last game of his St. Andrews career," Weinert continued. "We were playing Baden University, the same team we play tomorrow. Their entire team was instructed to get Rod Stephens. Well, when the game was about half over they got him—and we lost the game." The old coach chuckled.

"I don't know why I was disappointed, for it took their whole team to finally put him out. He was the greatest football player I ever had on one of my teams, though maybe he can inspire Jack or some others of you tonight so that I'll have to revise my opinion. That's why I want him to talk to you. Come on, Rod—tell us how it's done."

For a moment Rodney Stephens sat in a daze of astonishment. The denouncement he had expected had not come. Instead the old coach was holding him up as a super-player! His lips were dry and stiff as he tried to speak.

"Men," he began. "I— Coach Weinert overestimates me. Football has changed in the last twenty-five years. It isn't the same game I once played. There isn't any thing I can tell you, except—" He faltered for an instant, groping for a way to begin. "Just as Jack and I started out here we met Tim Hawkins."

The mention of Tim Hawkins brought a frank guffaw from his listeners. For an instant a sharp rebuke hung on Rodney Stephens' lips. But the eager, expectant faces of his audience choked it back unuttered. Instead he threw back his head and chuckled with them.

"I'm afraid," he said slowly, "that Tim has spoiled his otherwise fine football record by talking too much; and I'd hate to ruin mine that way!"

The football squad roared its appreciation. He was telling them what they wanted to hear. Rodney Stephens realized this and deliberately he continued to give them what they wanted and expected.

"I don't know how it happened," he went on. "But in my time we could always expect Baden University to have a team which would outweigh us at least five pounds to the man. Baden U. went in for choice bottle-fed beef. Of course, that is their own affair. Personally, I'm a firm believer in the old adage: 'The bigger they are the harder they fall.'"

For five or ten minutes he artfully played to the vanity and confidence of his audience. There wasn't a single serious overtone in his talk. He flattered and coaxed the men before him into a howl of approval; then Coach Weinert ordered them all to bed.

In the long hours of the night that followed Rodney Stephens realized that for the second time in his career, he had failed. And when sleep finally came to him, it brought with it the specter of an exulting dervish whirling and dancing on a pile of burning logs and shrieking in triumph as it held aloft a pair of gloves that would not burn.

WHEN the starting-time of the big game approached on the following day, Rodney Stephens had had no opportunity to redeem himself. Kathleen had motored out to the country club after breakfast and taken him in charge. Under her determined guidance he had visited classroom after classroom, meeting old teachers and alumni, and keeping himself on exhibit generally. Although he had tried to suggest to her that these were just the things he wanted to escape, Kathleen had instantly suspected him of not wanting to bore her with his old friends, and had redoubled her efforts to find more of them.

After their luncheon was over, in sheer self-defense Rodney proposed that they go early to the football stadium and watch the big crowd assemble.

"If you are sure there isn't anyone else you want to see," she agreed reluctantly.

"I'm positive," Rodney sighed.

They arrived at the football bowl just as the gates were opened. Kathleen handed the tickets to the gatekeeper, who whistled shrilly for an usher.

"President's box," Rodney heard the usher instructed; "—just follow him, sir."

They were led down a long concrete ramp to a box on the level of the sod and directly behind the St. Andrews bench.

"Is there anything else, sir?" the undergraduate usher asked deferentially.

Rodney shook his head and thanked him, but as the usher went back to his post he stopped long enough to whisper to one of the program boys who rushed over with two programs outstretched. Rodney mechanically reached in his pocket for change, but the boy would not accept his money.

"They're complimentary to the president's guests, sir," he explained shyly.

"But," Rodney protested, "don't you have to pay for all the copies you don't turn in?"

"That makes it all the more of an honor to give them to you, Mr. Stephens," the boy declared earnestly.

When he had gone Rodney turned to Kathleen, whose eyes were sparkling with pride and mischief.

"Young lady," he said sternly, "why in the devil didn't you tell me that we were going to sit stuck out in the middle of the field in President Campbell's box?"

"Perhaps I rather wanted to have everyone see me sitting out here with you," she confessed.

"If I could think of a single excuse I'd leave you sitting here by yourself," he grumbled. "No wonder Jack didn't let me have the tickets!"

With her face buried in the great armful of chrysanthemums Jack had thoughtfully provided, Kathleen managed to look properly contrite and adorable.

"Tell me about your speech last night to the football team," she requested. "Jack said it was the best one he had ever heard. The boys all thought it was wonderful."

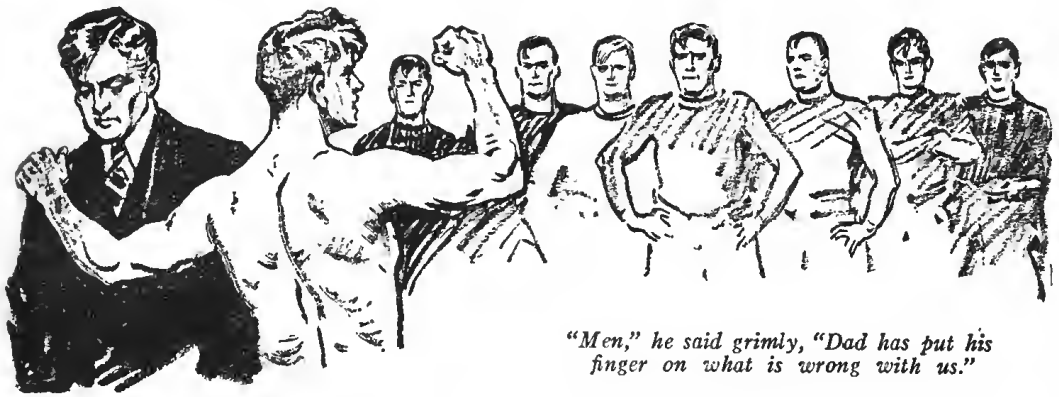
He managed to divert her attention to something else, but he could not check the bitter memories that her request had brought surging through his mind. A little later as the crowds jammed in, Tim Hawkins came shouting along the aisle and stopped for a moment.

"I heard last night you accused me of talking too much, Rod," Tim said with a good-natured laugh. There was no malice in the big fellow's voice—he took it as a good joke.

"I'm sorry, Tim," Rodney answered soberly. "I'm the one who talks too much, I'm afraid."

Tim's laughing answer was drowned in some noisy newcomers' yells from the top of the stands. The Baden University band came on the field and the crowd rose to give it welcome. During the confusion Tim ambled away.

The St. Andrews band came on the field next, marching with stiff, precise steps until it was abreast of the box where Rodney and Kathleen sat. At a flourish of the bandmaster's baton, it swung in toward the box and came to an abrupt halt. Two cheer-leaders sprang up and called for silence.



"Men," he said grimly, "Dad has put his finger on what is wrong with us."

First came the St. Andrews football song, followed by nine cheers for the team.

Again the yell-leaders called for silence.

"Here's old Rod Stephens," one of them shouted. "Let's give him the Old-Timers' Song."

Led by the band the rooting section sang. After it was over Rodney was forced to his feet for a bow. And then the rooters gave him nine to acknowledge his bow.

President Campbell and his wife entered the box, which was again made the center of attention. But suddenly the stands were hushed. At the end of the stadium two uniformed attendants were opening the players' gate.

Through this entrance a few seconds later came the St. Andrews team, led by Jack Stephens. After the team came the long line of substitutes streaming to the bench to huddle like so many Indians under the blue-and-gold blankets marked with a golden "A," while the first team went through a brief signal practice on the playing field.

The roar and tumult which greeted the blue-and-gold jerseys of St. Andrews had hardly died down when the big team of Baden University charged out from under the concrete stands.

St. Andrews kicked off. Baden received.

As Rodney Stephens had been in his day, Jack Stephens was now the offensive threat of St. Andrews. In addition to the kicking and running of Rodney's time Jack could hurl a forward pass with deadly accuracy. As his team waited, poised for the dash down field, he dropped back to kick. A second later the ball went spinning toward the far corner of the field, a perfect kick. It was high enough to let his men get down on the Baden end, who had received the ball before the interference could be formed.

"Look!" Rodney sprang to his feet and pointed at his son. Two Baden players had pinned him to the ground and, with a crash, a third one flung himself on the prostrate player as they watched. After his kick Jack had been the last St. Andrews man to go down the field. The attack on him had been unnecessary, made after the referee's whistle had blown. It meant but one thing to Rodney Stephens' football-trained mind.

"They're trying to take him out," he muttered, his fists clenched. "They're trying to get him!"

Jack shook himself free of the three Baden men and trotted back to his defensive position.

"He wasn't hurt," Kathleen laughed relievedly.

Twice the big Baden team tried to pierce the St. Andrews line and twice it was thrown back for a loss. With the ball on their own fifteen-yard line, on the third down Baden elected to kick. Jack received the punt and ran the ball back ten yards before he was downed under a pile of striped jerseys.

Again Jack got up sturdily, barking signals as he scrambled to his feet. From an open formation, he took the ball himself on a direct pass from the center, and head down charged through the Baden line off tackle. The headlinesman marked up an eight-yard gain.

"He fooled them that time," Rodney boasted; "they thought they had him scared."

"Jack's something like his father, when it comes to being scared, isn't he, Miss Kathleen?" President Campbell remarked with a smile. Kathleen nodded proudly.

On the next play, the St. Andrews fullback made more than the two yards necessary for a first down. Again Jack was buried under a pile of Baden players.

"They're keeping at him, Kathleen," Rodney explained, his voice tense. "They'll try to hammer him to pieces."

"They can't make him quit trying," she declared, confidently. "They would kill him first."

Rodney did not answer. He was thinking of another Baden team. It had been twenty-five years, but he could still remember the way it had pounded him, down after down, into final defeat.

THE first quarter ended with little advantage to either team. After penetrating the enemy territory at the start of the game, St. Andrews had gradually lost the ground it had gained. What advantage the Baden team had in weight was offset by the greater speed of the St. Andrews warriors. As the second quarter continued, it became apparent to the spectators that the fight would be mainly a question of endurance and stamina, or a lucky break.

Such a break came quicker than anyone expected, and with disastrous results to the hopes of St. Andrews. Baden kicked. Jack, under the shadow of his own goal, might have signaled for a fair catch. It was a long high punt, with a twist which made it dangerous to handle. It might have rolled on out of bounds, but the Baden ends were down on him and he was afraid to let them have a chance to touch the ball before it rolled over the line, or perhaps have it bounce off at right angles and be grounded with no gain.

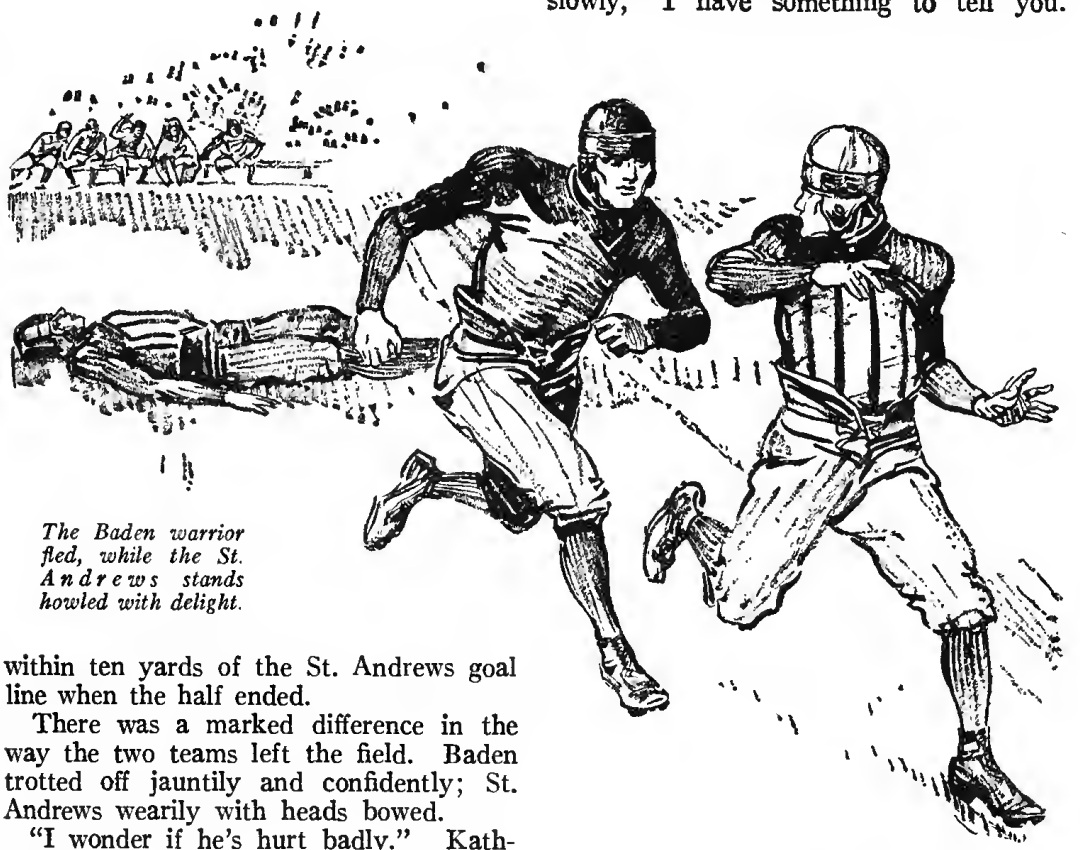
Instead he tried to catch the ball and run it back. It was a perfect catch but his arms had hardly cradled the ball when a Baden end hit him from the right side, driving him against another enemy tackler from the left. A third Baden man crashed into him head on and high. The ball flew from his grasp and rolled across the goal line into the arms of another Baden player.

A touchdown had been made.

Jack lay where he had fallen. Time out was called. Finally he staggered to his feet and called his men into formation, but as the visitors' rooting section roared, Baden completed the kick that gave them the additional point.

Twice in the few minutes that remained

of the second quarter, time had to be called out for Jack Stephens. Each time he got up a little weaker, reeling more. And after each time he went down, the big team made additional gains. They were



The Baden warrior fled, while the St. Andrews stands howled with delight.

within ten yards of the St. Andrews goal line when the half ended.

There was a marked difference in the way the two teams left the field. Baden trotted off jauntily and confidently; St. Andrews wearily with heads bowed.

"I wonder if he's hurt badly." Kathleen's voice trembled.

With his hands clenched in his pockets, Rodney Stephens stared hard at the field.

"The cowards!" Kathleen half sobbed.

"Wait here, Kathleen," Rodney commanded grimly. "I'm going to their dressing-room."

He vaulted from the box and strode off toward the players' gate, his chin thrown out and his shoulders back, totally unmindful of the buzz of comments that followed his progress across the field.

"Looks as though history was repeating itself, Rod," Chad Weinert said, greeting him with a rueful smile.

Scattered about the dressing-room with its reeking odors of perspiration, liniment, and sodden leather, were the St. Andrews players, some resting, some in the hands of rubbers. Two men were working over Jack, who lay stripped on a rubbing-table.

"I want to talk to your men, Chad." Rodney's voice was strained and sharp.

"I hoped you would come." The veteran coach turned to his team: "Men, keep on with what you are doing, but listen."

"Shoot, Dad," Jack invited with a painful attempt at a grin.

"Men of St. Andrews," Rodney said slowly, "I have something to tell you. Twenty-five years ago I played my last game for our old college. In that game eleven men of Baden University set out to get me. Coach Weinert told you last night that finally they did. That isn't true."

With his eyes averted and turned away from his son, Rodney continued: "They didn't get me. Men, I—I quit!"

Only Jack's sharp gasp was audible in the instant's awkward pause that followed.

"Men," Rodney confessed simply, "last night when I lighted the sacred St. Andrews bonfire, I made a pledge that I'd tell you this before the night was over. When I faced you last night it was with that intention—but I couldn't go through with it. I couldn't bear to humiliate my boy and his pride in my football fame."

Coach Weinert made a quick motion to interrupt but Rodney waved him back.

"Can you realize how the memory of my yellowness has haunted me for the past

twenty-five years?" he asked. *"That* is the reason I have never come back! I couldn't bear to face the towers of St. Andrews. I've lied to Jack to keep from coming—for I was ashamed to come."

With almost a sob of disappointment Jack buried his face in his arms.

"When I mentioned Tim Hawkins last night, I meant to tell you—but you all laughed and my nerve left me. Men, I *was* a born football player—it came easy to me. Tim Hawkins was the most awkward man who ever put on a football suit. For four years he endured gibes and jeers and ridicule, but he would not give up. Finally he made the St. Andrews line in my last big game and men, he held his ground until they carried him off the field with a broken leg. And then he fought to get back in!"

He paused and walked over to the table where Jack lay with heaving shoulders. With one hand on his son's quivering back, he went on:

"Gentlemen," he said quietly, "it isn't the loss of a game that matters. Some one *must* lose. It is the loss of your self-respect that counts. Many a time in the years that have followed my football days I have been tempted to lay down. I would not have been blamed. Men didn't blame me for quitting the football field when I did. Even Coach Weinert thought I could go no farther. But in my heart I knew better; and I've fought for the men who had faith in me, even after they themselves quit fighting—and I've come through."

He waited for the significance of his words to sink into the minds of his listeners.

"Gentlemen," he concluded, "each one of you has made a pledge to St. Andrews. Whether you win this game today or whether you lose it will not affect the honor of St. Andrews, but men, if you go off the football field this afternoon without giving everything that it is in you to give, you will have disgraced the sacred name of your college and in your hearts you will have left a scar that time cannot heal. Will you be able to come back in future years as Tim Hawkins comes, joyously happy that he gave all that was in him for the cause he was pledged to uphold—or will you come back as I have come, miserably unhappy and ashamed to show yourselves in the presence of the gray towers you have failed?"

With bowed head Rodney turned toward the door, his confession done—but Jack blocked his way.

"Dad,"—the tears were streaming down his son's face but his chin was proudly up,—"I don't know what happened twenty-five years ago and furthermore I don't care, but I do know that it takes more nerve than I ever dreamed a man could have, to stand up and say what you have just told us! I'm prouder of you now than I have ever been!"

With one arm around his father's shoulders he turned to his team.

"Men," he said grimly, "Dad has put his finger on what is wrong with us. We have been trying to lay down. I've tried harder than any of the rest of you. I've just been waiting to be knocked out, but God help the Baden man who tries to put me out when I go back on the field!"

The inarticulate growl of men incapable of speech answered for the team.

"Now, Dad," Jack finished affectionately, "go out and tell the whole cockeyed world to watch us come back!"

A warning whistle blew outside the door and some one announced that the rest period was up. The two teams were lining up for the third-quarter kick-off when Rodney got back to the box.

"If you think Jack's hurt, just watch him!" he reassured Kathleen.

AGAIN the ball sailed away from Jack's toe toward the far corner of the field, and, as before, two Baden players came at the kicker. But the results this time were different. Head down, Jack charged at the larger of the two. His impact threw the astonished Baden player clear of the turf and left him lying senseless on his back. Whirling, Jack flung himself on the second man who originally rushed down at him. Seeking instinctive self-preservation, the Baden warrior turned and fled, while the St. Andrews stands howled with delight.

That was the way the third quarter started. When the game ended, the score stood twenty-six to seven, in favor of St. Andrews.

As Tim Hawkins dragged him on the field to lead the victorious snake-dance, Rodney Stephens realized that at last the chalk-mark against his name had been erased from the big Book of Life. By his confession he had found his conscience-freed soul, and his exultant war-whoop was more than a cry of victory—it was a prayer of thanksgiving!



As the white man bent over, the Malay leaped upon his back.

On the Midnight Tide

The author of "McGoogan's Odyssey," "The Fourfathom Wallop" and many another noted story is at his best in this fine salty tale of sea-adventure.

By CARL CLAUSEN

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

MARTIN ROSS, skipper of the brigantine *Jerfalcon,* stopped in his pacing of the deck and removed his pipe from his mouth. Straining his eyes into the darkness to starboard, he listened intently.

A mile distant from the *Jerfalcon's* anchorage twinkled a small cluster of lights on the crescented shoreline of the lagoon. The night before, when the brigantine had swept through the reef-bound entrance, there had been no lights there, but with a pearler in the roadstead old Tsi Hung had removed his shutters and garnished his old rookery of a dance-hall. Now across the still lagoon bursts of revelry came faintly to Captain Ross' ears. He shrugged his shoulders. The boys were entitled to their blowout after the seven weeks of arduous toil on the pearling grounds of the Gulf.

The night was oppressively hot—little or no improvement on the stifling day that had died in tropical haste two hours earlier. The Captain's eyes traced the dark shoreline sunk in ragged pitchblack shadows, adamantine in their opaqueness. The air was heavy with the odor of leathery foliage. A sea-blown firefly hummed through the rigging above his head, a slow-moving point of light whose progress seemed impeded by the heavy, humid atmosphere.

Again he listened. Between the bursts of revelry his alert ears caught a soft clicking sound as of oarlocks moving in their sockets, with stealth, he thought, then dismissed the notion. Some belated fisherman returning from the reef with snapper, he decided. Knocking the ashes from his pipe, he took a turn about the deck to see that everything was snug and tight. The crew

would probably not return until daylight, so it was no use staying up for them. Ryan, the mate, would see to it that they kept reasonably sober. Steady youngster, Ryan. He'd make a good skipper some day—no nonsense about him! If it hadn't been for him, Ross would never have let them take the surfboat. The other boat had been smashed in a sea off Cape York. He hoped the boys would keep their mouths shut.

It had been a profitable season, he reflected. Below hatches there were a hundred and eight-odd tons of shell, good grade, heavy and pink-edged, worth in the neighborhood of two hundred dollars a ton on the wharf at San Francisco. The small safe in the chartroom contained some eighteen thousand dollars' worth of pearls that might attract some of the renegades who attach themselves like leeches to the cheap dance-halls of Western Oceania. Yes, he certainly hoped the boys would keep their mouths shut!

GOING forward, he examined the cable and noted by its tautness that the tide was running out fast. When he craned his neck over the side he saw two black scimitar-shaped points cleaving the two-knot current less than ten feet from the bow of the vessel. He shivered. The lagoon of Tangu was one of the most notoriously shark-infested sheets of water under the Southern Cross.

He looked to the riding-light, trimmed its wick, and adjusted it until it burned a steady white flame, then crossed to the forehatch where a small canvas-covered one-man canoe lay bottom up. He had given it its last coat of waterproof paint during the day. Touching it with the tips of his fingers, he noted with satisfaction that the paint was dry.

He smiled softly as he thought of the cries of delight that would issue from little Mart's lips when he saw that canoe. Ross had promised him one for his twelfth birthday, a month hence. He had built it himself between watches, modeling it from a memory-picture of an Eskimo kayak. Like the kayak, its waterproof compartments made it unsinkable. Little Mart could paddle safely and to his heart's content from one end of San Francisco Bay to the other. As it would hold only one person, there'd be no danger of complications with the lad's other playmates.

Ross sighed as he remembered his wife's words of protest every time the subject of a canoe came up.

"I know what you're trying to do, Skipper;"—"Skipper" was her term of endearment for him,—"you're trying to make a sailor of him and take him away from me. It's bad enough to be sitting on Telegraph Hill waiting for a husband to stick his head through the door twice a year! Have a heart, Skipper—he was born web-footed, as it is!"

Ross didn't blame Ellen. He supposed it got pretty lonesome for her at times. She was a good scout and a fine manager. It was her saving and her managing that had kept him from dry-rotting in a mate's berth, and that had enabled him to buy the *Jerfalcon* three years ago—one-third cash and a mortgage for the balance. This trip would make it easier, though. The pearls in the safe were all velvet. With the proceeds of their sale he'd be able to clear off the balance due on the brigantine, which was mighty lucky. The bank had been fussing about carrying him any longer and shipping securities were not attractive to individual investors since the post-war slump.

But he'd be able to take care of the whole sum now and have enough left over to pay down on a cottage on Euclid Heights in Berkeley where Ellen could see the fog roll through the Golden Gate, without having to live in it.

There were mighty few women like Ellen, he reflected. He was lucky all right!

Well, he would show her how greatly he appreciated her, Ross resolved. Her life should soon be easier. Five years more—if things went well—and he'd have another vessel, a sister to the *Jerfalcon*. Handy rig, the brigantine, for these latitudes where you run before the trade-winds for days at a time. He'd hire skippers to run them and rent himself an office downtown. "The Ross Navigation Company" would look fine on a frosted pane. And Ellen rolling down at four-thirty in the afternoon in a closed car with plate-glass windows and a shasta daisy in a cut-glass vase!

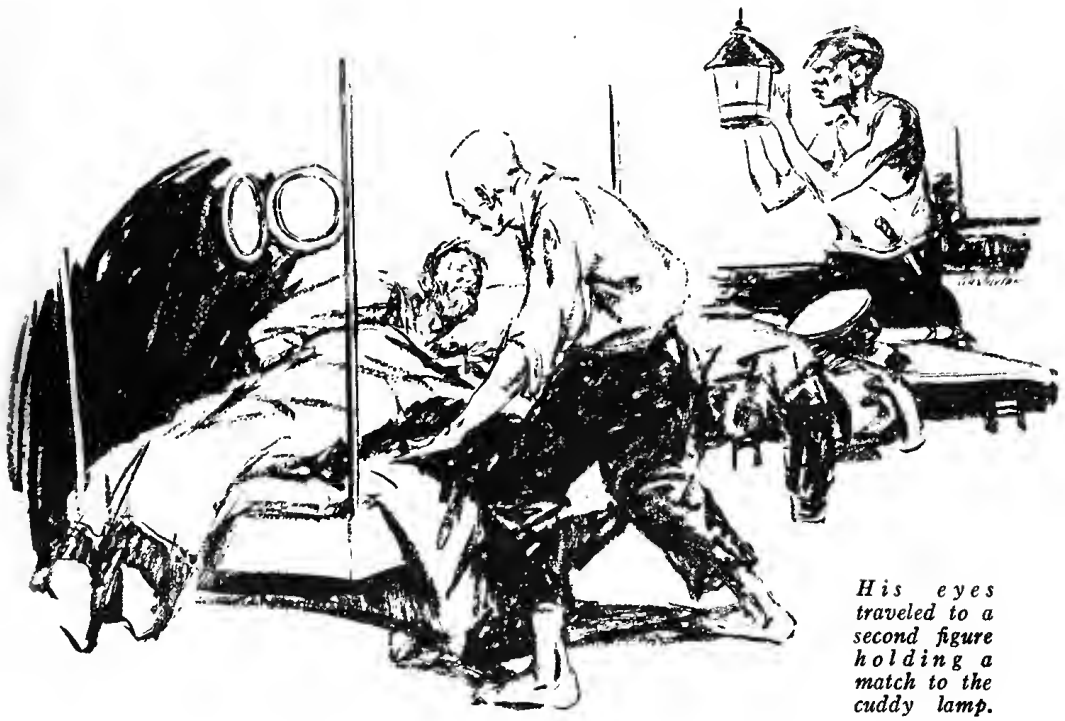
With these pleasant visions in his mind he went below. Lighting the cuddy lamp in his cabin, he went into the chartroom adjoining, and gave the handle of the small safe, which he'd had built into the wall and which contained the pearls in chamois-skin bags, a tug or two to assure himself that it was locked securely; then he went back into his cabin. The burn-

ing cuddy lamp raised the already stifling temperature of the small compartment perceptibly, so he undressed quickly.

When he hooked back the door of the cabin for ventilation, he caught sight of his face in the mirror on the wall and he grinned at the image he saw reflected therein—on the pearling grounds there had been no time for the little niceties of life. His gray eyes twinkled as he wondered what Ellen would say if she could see him with that seven-weeks' growth of reddish-brown beard.

Turning out the cuddy lamp, he rolled into his bunk. It was too hot for covers. For a few minutes he lay listening in the darkness to the southing of the tide under the open porthole near his head. Then, overcome by drowsiness and heat, he dropped off to sleep. . . . .

Sometimes a subtle warning of danger is transmitted to the sleeping mind. Biologists have tried to explain this with solemn monographs on reflex action traced back to arboreal ancestry. To Captain Ross this warning came as he tossed in his bunk on the borderland between sleeping and waking. The warning was, however, not insistent enough to awaken him fully. The sound of muffled oars dipping in the tide was synchronous with the swish of the water eddying under the brigantine's stern. The stealthy tread of bare feet along the deck did not reach his consciousness at all, so at the words, "Lie still or get this knife between your ribs!" he merely opened his eyes and blinked dazedly at the dark figure bending over him. His eyes traveled to the knife whose point was pressed against a spot on his pajama suit immediately above his heart, then to a second dark figure in the act of holding a spluttering match to the wick of the cuddy lamp.



His eyes traveled to a second figure holding a match to the cuddy lamp.

He made an ineffectual grab for the revolver under his pillow, but the man with the knife anticipated the move. The pistol fell clattering to the floor.

"Another move like that and you'll be feeding the sharks!" the intruder said, as his companion picked the gun up.

Ross regarded the two through half-closed lids. The fellow bending over him with the knife was a white man—at least his skin was white. The rest of his racial characteristics were blurred by the dregs of life. His small, pointed ears hugged the close-cropped bullet head. A pair of black, porcine eyes set much too wide apart glared at Ross from beneath a brow furrowed as if by habitual scowling. Nouhala, the penal settlement of Oceania, was only fifty miles to the west, Ross knew.

The other, whose flat nose, high cheek-bones and muddy complexion proclaimed him a half-caste Malay, was loose-lipped, vacuous of eye and slight of build. He was also armed with a knife; he seemed to be taking orders from his companion, and his speech was the monosyllabic pidgin-English of his breed.

Without removing his eyes from Ross' face or the knife point from the Skipper's breast, the white man said to his companion, holding out his left hand:

"Give me the gun!"

The half-caste complied, and the other shifted the weapon to his right hand and stepped back, with the muzzle pointed at Ross' head. Replacing the knife in his belt, he reached for the pair of handcuffs which hung on a nail at the foot of the bunk. They were rusty from disuse, for Ross did not believe in strong-arm methods. He had never found it necessary to resort to handcuffs. He had come upon them in the chartroom locker among a lot of other odds and ends when he had taken possession of the vessel three years earlier and had kept them as a curiosity. He wished now that he had acted upon his first impulse and had thrown them overboard.

THE man slipped one of the steel bands about Ross' right wrist and jerked the Skipper to a sitting position.

"Get up!" he ordered. "And if you know what's good for you, you wont try anything funny," he added.

Ross slid out of the bunk. Had the man been alone he'd have taken a chance on knocking the gun out of his hand and grappling with him, but with the two, such a course would be suicide. The Malay's knife would be buried between his shoulder-blades in a moment. Because there was nothing else to do, the Skipper suffered himself to be handcuffed to one of the iron stanchions by which the bunk was suspended from the ceiling.

The man pocketed the gun and jerked his thumb in the direction of the chartroom.

"The combination of the safe," he said, "—and be quick about it!"

Ross stalled for time.

"I've forgotten it," he lied. "Ryan, my mate, has it written down on a piece of paper. He's ashore."

A hairy, knobbed fist shot out and caught him a staggering blow on the temple.

"P'raps that'll remind you!" the man said. "Kick through or be drilled through!" His hand moved toward his hip pocket, from which the handle of the pistol protruded.

Ross' head swam from the force of the blow. A trickle of blood ran down his cheek and into the corner of his mouth.

"I'm telling you the truth!" he protested, thickly.

The knotted fist drove through the air again. Ross' knees sagged at the impact. Through vision blurred by purple and scarlet flashes, the lights of Tsi Hung's dance-hall mocked him beyond the open porthole.

"Do I get the combination or do I have to shoot it out of you?" the man growled, thrusting his face within a foot of Ross', his evil, wide-set eyes glittering in the smoky flare of the cuddy lamp.

ROSS said nothing. His throbbing head slumped forward against the cool iron stanchion. The loss of the pearls meant disaster, final and absolute. Five years of work for nothing and all his savings gone, the cottage on Euclid Heights an unrealized dream, and worst of all, no college for little Mart! At a forced sale the *Jerfalcon* would fetch little above her incumbrance, with freight rates as they were at present, many better bottoms being idle for lack of charter.

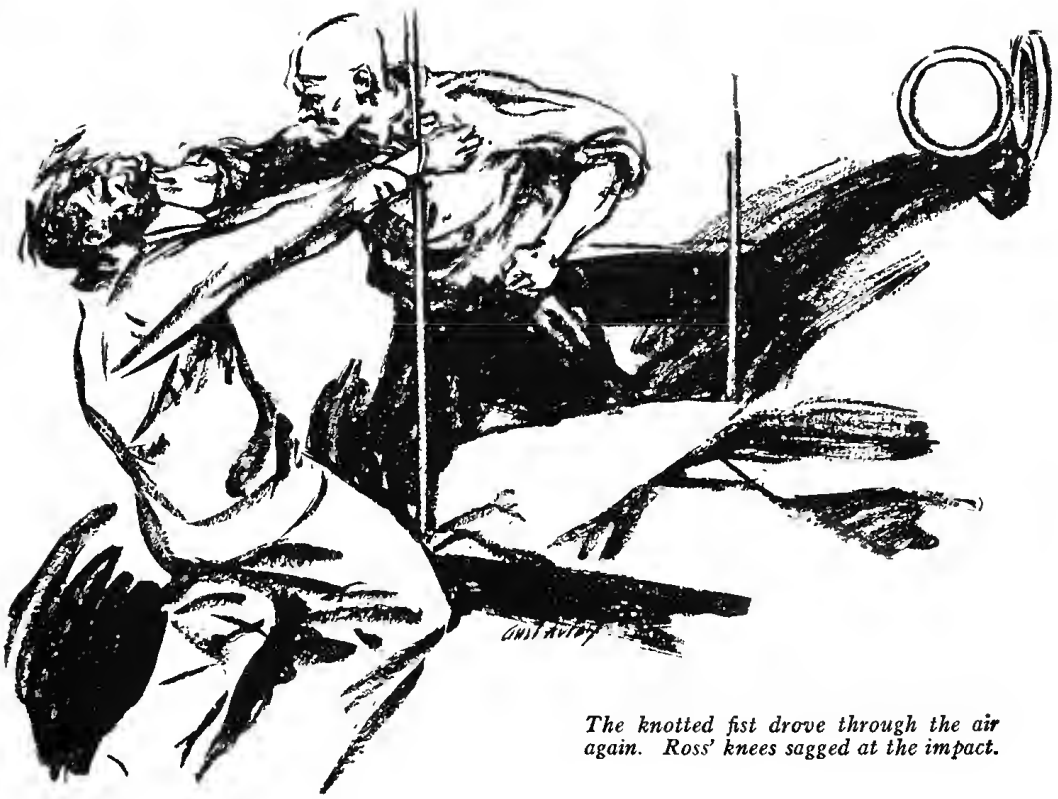
He stared smokily through the porthole at the mocking lights of Tsi Hung's; also at something else: a rope that moved up and down within a foot or two of the aperture. To his tortured vision it appeared like a hair laid across the lens of a telescope. It dropped out of sight only to reappear and pass between him and the twinkling lights. He tried to think what it could be; then it came to him in a flash.

He heard the voice of his inquisitor as from a long distance:

"P'raps this'll make you talk!"

He glanced down at the knife-point touching his chest, which his assailant had bared with the wrench of an arm. As the point gashed his skin, he merely gritted his teeth. A plan was forming in his mind, but he must not give in too quickly, lest they become suspicious.

IT became a battle between fortitude and avarice, between the cunning of the trapper and the greater cunning of the trapped, whose wits had been sharpened by desperation. Again and again the



The knotted fist drove through the air again. Ross' knees sagged at the impact.

needle-like point of the knife seared his breast, bleeding now from half a dozen shallow gashes. The Malay half-breed stood by, blinking, his long arms dangling at his loins and his lower lip drooping askew.

The other drew the knife in a final slash across Ross' chest, then stepped over to the cuddy lamp. Removing the chimney, he thrust the point of the knife into the flame, and held it there until it glowed red.

"This'll make you talk, you —," he said between his teeth and he brought the glowing point within an inch of Ross' cheek.

"I'll tell!" cried Ross, shrinking from the red-hot metal in feigned terror.

"I thought that would make you listen to reason," the other said triumphantly. "Do your little sum, and don't make any mistake in addition—or you'll get well scorched."

Ross called off the numbers.

"Got a pencil?" said the other.

"There's one in the pocket of my vest," Ross told him.

"We're getting accommodating," the other sneered, as he searched the vest pocket with grimy fingers. "All right—read 'em off again!"

Ross repeated the five numbers.

"I'm not sure whether the middle one is six or seven. Try seven first. If it doesn't work it'll be the six."

"It'd *better* be one or the other!" the man scowled, as he jotted the two numbers down on a slip of paper which he tore from a calendar on the wall.

"It will be," said Ross. "We changed the combination last week. Ryan put it down in his daybook. He's got it with him."

The man lifted the cuddy lamp out of its gimbals and after replacing the chimney carried it into the chartroom, followed by the Malay.

LEFT alone in the dark, Captain Ross worked fast to carry out his plan. Hoisting himself to the edge of the bunk, he thrust his right leg through the open porthole. For what seemed like an age he groped with his bare foot for the rope, straining to the effort of reaching it. Twice his foot touched it. It eluded him time and again, but at last he caught it over his ankle and drew his foot through the porthole. It took careful manipulation to pull the bight of the rope through the aperture and keep it from slipping off his ankle. It also took every ounce of his waning strength to draw his leg up so that he could get his fingers on the rope.

He accomplished it at last, raised it in

his manacled hands and sank his teeth into it. He blessed the fortuitous circumstance that the three-strand half-inch rope was old and soft.

He had gnawed one strand through when he heard a muttered curse from the chart-room as the man discovered the first combination to be wrong and started on the second.

The ruse had worked!

As his teeth tore at the second manila strand, he heard the click of the tumblers and an exclamation from the two as they ravaged the safe of its precious store. He gnawed through the second strand while they snarled at each other over the division of the spoils.

One minute more and the last strand parted between his teeth.

HE straightened up and let both ends go. They dropped swiftly out of sight through the open porthole.

Presently the two men returned with the cuddy lamp. Each carried in his hand a small chamois-skin bag half-full of pearls. The white man replaced the lamp in its gimbals.

"You could have saved yourself a lot of trouble and carving if you hadn't been bull-headed," he told Ross. "You might have known we meant business. Good night and pleasant dreams, Captain!"

He raised his hand in a mock salute, turned on his heel and left with the half-caste at his heels.

Ross heard them mount the companion-way steps and the clatter of their feet as they descended the poop ladder to the deck. Then silence, followed immediately by exclamations of profanity and excited pidgin-English. Ross smiled grimly.

They were back in a moment. The big burly figure of the white man filled the doorway. Behind him stood the Malay, his muddy face a sickly green in the light of the swinging cuddy lamp.

"Our boat's gone adrift," said the spokesman. "The painter parted. Where's your dinghy?"

"We lost it in a squall off Cape York," Ross informed him.

The other drew in his breath sharply. He glowered at Ross as if divining that he had been tricked.

"Where d'you keep your life-rafts?" he demanded.

"Luggers with a crew of twelve don't carry life-rafts," Ross reminded him gently. He was smiling, but his gray eyes were daggers of triumph. The man glared at him balefully and fingered the butt of the pistol in the back pocket. "I've a good mind to plug you for that grin!" he said.

"No doubt," said Ross; "only you'd swing from the foreyard when the boys get back."

The other made a noise in his throat.

"Any spare sticks we could make a raft of?" he demanded.

"You might send down the royal and topgallant yards and ride them ashore," Ross suggested; "only you'd have to keep your feet inboard or you'd be wearing wooden legs for the rest of your lives."

"You think you're funny, don't you?" the other snarled.

"I'm getting a little amusement out of a unique situation," Ross admitted modestly. "Ever hear the story of the Lady and the Tiger? No? Well, here you are within a mile of the densest jungle in the Western Pacific with eighteen thousand dollars' worth of first-class pearls. If you try to swim, the sharks'll get you; if you stay, my crew will. Heads, I win—tails, you lose."

The white man's eyes narrowed to slits, and his fingers closed about the butt of the pistol. Ross slowly shook his head.

"I wouldn't shoot if I were you! Killing me would merely hasten your own demise," he remarked. "You'd be dangling from my yardarms—instead of decorating the gibbet at the Nouhala some nice sunny morning."

The two men exchanged glances. The chance shot had hit its mark.

"Too bad the tide's going out," Ross went on, "or you might have unshipped the cable and let us drift. As it is, we'd be pounded to pieces in the surf in fifteen minutes." He sighed. "Things sure look black for you boys—at least for one of you," he mused, as if by an afterthought.

"What d'you mean—one of us?" the other demanded, coming up close. The Malay glided across the threshold with a soft cat-like tread. His black eyes flitted distrustfully from one to the other of the two Caucasians.

"I mean what I said," Ross retorted tantalizingly. He noted with satisfaction the stealthy movement of the half-caste's brown hand for the knife in his belt.

"One of you can get away with the pearls. The other will have to stay and face the music—and it'll be some dance tune, I can tell you that!"

The white man shot his dark-skinned companion a quick veiled glance out of the tail of his eye, at which the half-caste's hand dropped from the handle of the belted dagger.

This exchange of looks was not lost on Ross. He chose his next words carefully: "Seems to me there's nothing left for you two to do, except toss up for it," he said.

"Suppose you explain," the other snarled. "I'm no good at conundrums."

"This is no conundrum. If two men are about to be hung and one escapes—well, do your little sum and don't make any mistake in subtraction," he mocked. "The yardarm of the *Jerfalcon* swings wide and free!"

"Stow that necktie talk," said the man with a grimace, "I've shot myself out of worse holes than this. Spill the glad news —and be quick about it!"

"For a consideration," said Ross. Unseeming haste or eagerness would arouse their suspicion. He was playing, not for time but upon their individual cupidity, and upon the strongest of all human instincts, self-preservation. Nevertheless, it was a delicate situation. One misstep, and his plan would come to naught. The intruder regarded him in black silence, his malignant eyes flashing suspicion.

"What's your proposition?" he growled, one eye on his companion, who leaned forward as if better to hear.

"Unshackle me from the stanchion," said Ross; "that's my consideration!" Then, as the other made a wry face, he added: "You can leave the handcuffs on me if that'll make you feel any easier."

"I see." The white man took the handcuff key from his pocket and motioned to the half-caste.

"Undo him," he ordered curtly, tossing over the key.

Stepping back, he trained the pistol on Ross. His bullet head was thrust forward and his cruel black eyes glinted along the barrel.

The Malay quickly unfastened Ross, then manacled his hands behind at the other's instruction. The white man took the key from the half-caste and tossed it through the porthole. "Safety first!" he leered.

Instead of answering, Ross led the way up the companionway and for'ard to where the canvas canoe was lying, bottom up, on the fore-hatch. The pistol never left the small of his back for a moment.

"Help yourself, gentlemen," he said, indicating the skiff.

The two groped for it in the darkness and turned it over.

"As you'll note, it'll hold but one."

"That's easy," said the white man to his companion. "I'll go ashore and come back with a boat for you, Hassan."

"But will he come back, Hassan?" Ross said. "Methinks not, old socks!"

"You keep your face out of this before I change my mind and plug you!" the plug-ugly growled at the Skipper, as he caught hold of one end of the canoe. "Come on, nigger, lend a hand!"

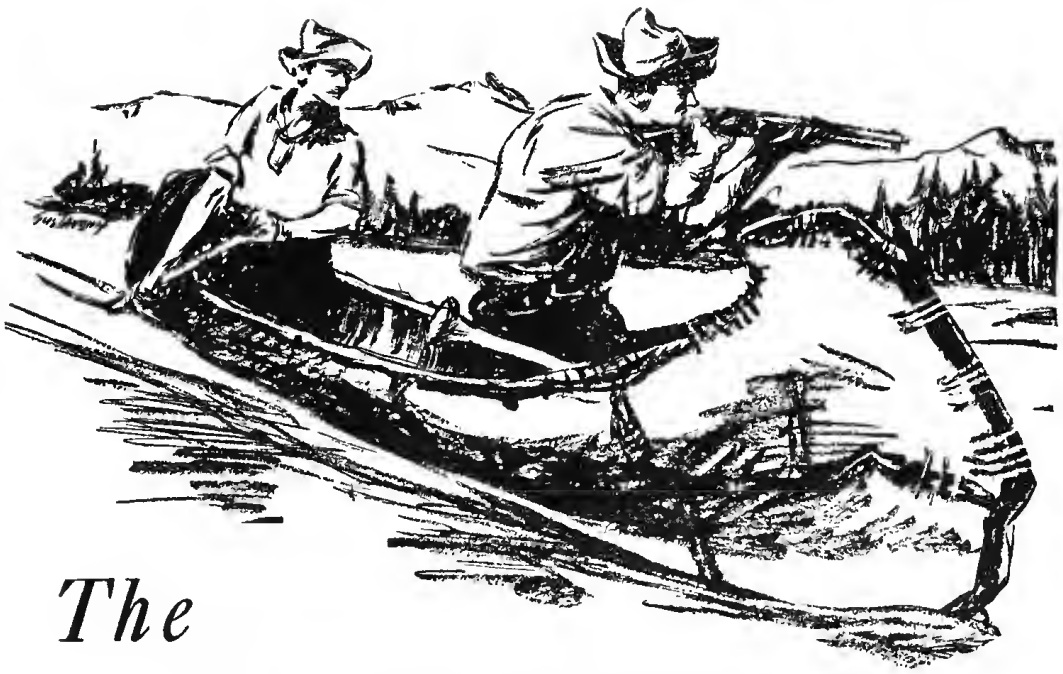
THE half-caste picked up his end of the canoe and the two carried it to the bulwarks. As the white man bent over to tie a rope in the painter ring, the Malay leaped upon his back like a panther and sank his knife to the hilt under the left armpit of the stooping man.

Straightening up with a bellow of rage and pain, the white man twisted himself about and shook his assailant off. The native regained his feet in a moment and leaped at him again. A stab of flame belched from the right hand of the mortally wounded man. It caught the half-caste square in the chest, while he was in midair. The two went down together, and rolled into the scuppers and the gun went clattering along the deck.

Captain Ross poked the two still figures with the toe of his boot. Manacled though he was, he managed to extract the two small chamois-skin bags containing the pearls from the dead men's pockets. As he did so, he noted that the Malay's knife had ripped a great slit in the canvas bottom of the canoe.

"Just a little job for the sailmaker," he remarked, philosophically. "Mart, old man, you came pretty near losing your kayak!"

"Fortune, Inc." is the title of one of the liveliest short novels The Blue Book Magazine has ever published. Its hero rides into a defunct town aboard a motorcar tied together with twine and baling-wire, and before he leaves puts the town and himself on the map. Read this in the next, the December, issue.



The Arnold Legacy

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

"DEAD sure she's on this evening's train, are you, Wayne?"

Stephen Wayne, boss of the Arnold Lode Mine, turned from watching the distant blue notch in the Canadian Rockies.

"Dead sure, Jim," he answered young Dorval, his loyal tunnel-master. "She wired me from Winnipeg, then from Edmonton."

He looked again at the blue notch, for the Transcontinental was due. In the glass of the station window he glanced once at his reflection and straightened his soft gray hat.

The reflection showed a man thirty years old, tall, gray-eyed, strong of feature. There were tell-tale crowfeet of worry and overwork beneath his eyes. His hands were acid-stained, and his white collar showed up his dark bronze plainly.

His new tweeds, he noted, looked all right, but they felt strange. He wanted to be out of them and into his workaday corduroys again. He smiled as he recollected what Dorval had said an hour ago at their cabin:

"You've plumb lost the knack of being leisurely, Wayne. Hell, who wouldn't—doing what you've done! You'll be the better for a long vacation, especially since it'll be your honeymoon. You and her are *hyaking* into the mountains, *neppy,* son?"

Dorval, beside him now, was smaller of build and three years younger. French blood showed in his black hair and eyes and his impulsive, ardent nature. A college man from a maritime province, he was Wayne's subordinate but his partner none the less.

"Ble'e me, you're lucky, Wayne," he mused. "Only the Lord knows when I'll be down on this platform waiting for *my* train to come in."

"You can bring Eleanor out this summer, Jim. The old mine wont stand much increase in expenses, but I'll swing you a decent salary somehow. The four of us will have a *hiyu* good time together."

AROUND them at the station a little group had gathered for the event of the Transcontinental's arrival. Here and there on the platform one heard the soft



By WILLIAM BYRON MOWERY

This splendid novelette by the gifted author of "The Loon Lake Patrol" and "Red Heritage" deals with a high adventure in the mining country of the Northwest. This is a real story.

guttural of the Chinook jargon, the common language which French and English and a dozen Indian nations used with one another.

There were several bewhiskered, raggedy old sourdoughs, in from the color creeks for grub and human company. A knot of "Norski" timbermen from the lumber-camps in the mountains, a mounted policeman talking to a fire ranger. A big powerful Indian, Attistah, from the "Lost" Beaver tribe; two Blackfeet *métis* idling in the evening sun—lazy, *cultus* half-breeds who guided the occasional tourist and loafed between times. A sportsman with duffle-bags and varnished fishheads stood waiting for the Transcontinental to whirl him on across the mountains to the salmon streams of the Pacific.

A mere "jump-down" in the heart of giant ranges, Valleria was linked to civilization only by the slender ribbon of steel. No auto-road or wagon-trail could get in to it; cañons, lakes and tumultuous rivers barred the way, to say nothing of the mountains.

Back of the station was the Arnold mine —a shaft entering a slope, a stamp-mill, the houses of the workers and the gaunt frame residence which old P. K. Arnold had built. On a knoll above the mine towered the great pine tree, lightning-seared but still stanch, where the mine-owner had been killed four years ago.

THE story of those four years was a story of self-sacrifice and loyalty on the part of Stephen Wayne—loyalty not to old Arnold, but to the person for whom he held the property in trust.

At its best the mine was only a poor excuse. Under less able managing it would have been closed down and Valleria deserted. The shaft had tapped only a niggardly pocket of the rich mother lode. The parent vein that gave color to the creeks and had baffled a generation of prospectors, lay elsewhere, hidden in the wilderness of mountains.

Though he knew little himself about mining, old Arnold was shrewd enough to know a good engineer when he saw one. Recognizing Wayne's genius, he had given over the reins even before his death, and specified in his will that Wayne was to be manager of the mine.

When he might have been using his abilities elsewhere at a salary of his own naming, Wayne had taken the burden on his shoulders and sacrificed the most precious years of his life in keeping the mine alive. For if it closed down, Nancy Arnold would be penniless; and he was the only man capable and willing to take the job.

The memory of those two sunlit years between his coming to Valleria and Nancy's going East to school just before her father's death, had made that sacrifice a cheerful one for Wayne. He had lived largely in

the expectation of her return, of the moment just ahead of him now.

There was nothing of the father in the girl's make-up. Sweet-souled, candid and laughter-hearted—Wayne often had thought that her mother must have been like her and had been crushed by the dour nature and hard-handed rule of Arnold.

From the first a friendship was struck up between the girl of seventeen and the young engineer. As she grew into young womanhood, the comradeship deepened into something more powerful and fundamental. They never mentioned it to each other, never gave the old Roman excuse to thunder his disapproval at them, though he must have seen their intimacy.

Even when she left, their engagement was unspoken. She was very young; Wayne was the first man to make a profound impression on her. He considered it unfair to bind her with a promise before she had been able to compare him with the other men she would meet.

Only Jim Dorval and Hyacinthe, the office manager, knew how Wayne had labored those four long years to keep Nancy's property for her. He had taken no wages for himself; the mine simply would not stand it. There had been times when the ghost had not walked for the workers, and they stuck only out of loyalty to their boss till he could pay them again. The fear that the vein would run out haunted him constantly. He was handicapped by a poor mill and poor shaft-equipment, tied down by lack of money and by the strict injunctions of the Arnold will.

Massive and dominating in his lifetime, old Arnold had tried to rule on after his death. His will minutely regulated the policies of the mine and dictated this and that to its superintendent. For all his punctiliousness about it, the legacy that he left was destined to work evil: debts, sullen tempers among the workmen, a mine struggling to keep up, and a superhuman task for the man who took up the burden.

What other things of evil there were in old Arnold's legacy, Wayne could not even guess. He had seen only that portion of the will which related to himself and the property.

NANCY knew nothing about the situation at the mine. Her father had known little enough about the true nature of the lode, preferring his own opinion to Wayne's report. He had kept his daughter in complete ignorance about the mining operations, for his philosophy of woman's place was summed up in the word *household.*

Wayne himself had not written her the truth; he did not want to cast a shadow over her care-free years at school. To her, a gold-mine meant something tremendously rich. She did not understand why the checks she received were often meager.

Several times in her letters to Wayne she had wondered about it, and once had written rather sharply, asking the reason. One of her summer trips to Europe had almost foundered the mine and turned Valleria into a ghost camp.

But that was all past now. The ore-bearing vein had taken a notion to widen suddenly into a respectable size. The assay-sheet was looking up. The workmen were getting good wages. The last debt had been lifted in May. And *Nancy was coming back that evening.*

IN the blue notch ten miles eastward a black smoke-streamer rose up above the forest and faded against the sky. Wayne watched it intently, unconscious of Jim's words or the stir upon the platform.

In a few minutes the Transcontinental came in sight down the tracks. The rails began to sing. At the platform-edge, the old station-master wigwagged the signal that he had a passenger going west. The long train thundered into Valleria and stopped. The sportsman got on.

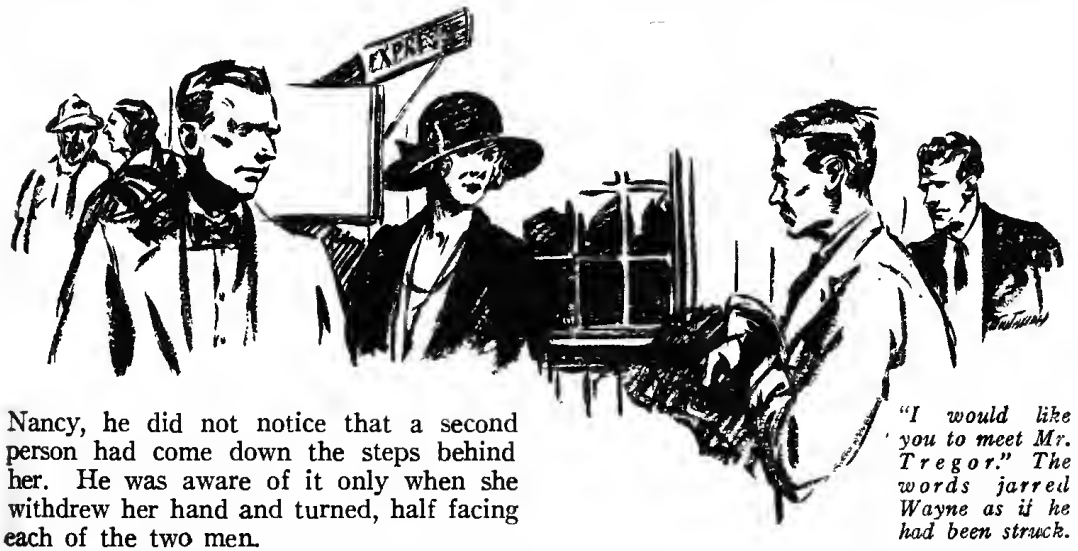
Wayne's heart stopped pounding—till he caught sight of a girlish figure tripping down the steps a coach away. He hurried to meet her, Dorval following discreetly.

He had told himself that the four years since the day they bade each other *klahowya* had necessarily changed her, but he was hardly prepared for so utter an alteration as he saw. In that moment of their meeting she seemed so like a stranger that he hardly knew how to greet her.

She was a woman now. She had grown more beautiful, more alluring than the Nancy he had known. She had learned how to make the most of her lithe, graceful form, of her light brown hair and blue eyes and features exquisitely molded. Her mere traveling clothes, trim and jaunty, were a dozen times prettier than any she had ever worn before she had gone East. Her very manner was different. The frank open-heartedness of the girl who had left four years ago was changed to a calm poise and reserve.

She smiled when she saw him, and gave him her gloved hand. Her word of greeting seemed studied, her smile artificial and cold. But in another moment, when he clasped her hand, the feeling of estrangement vanished for him. Four years and all the change they possibly could bring about meant nothing against his affection.

In Wayne's oblivion to everything but Nancy, he did not notice that a second person had come down the steps behind her. He was aware of it only when she withdrew her hand and turned, half facing each of the two men.



"I would like you to meet Mr. Tregor." The words jarred Wayne as if he had been struck.

"Mr. Wayne, I would like you to meet Mr. Tregor."

For some reason the words jarred Wayne as if he had been struck a blow. He looked at the man standing beside her: a stranger of his own age and build; a handsomely dressed man with quick, intelligent eyes and an air of polished politeness.

He turned bewilderedly to Nancy, his glance a question about the stranger. She understood.

"Mr. Tregor is a friend of mine, Mr. Wayne."

A friend! He caught the inflection behind the word. The stress of her voice meant something more than friendship between her and the stranger who had come with her to Valleria.

It dazed him. Not a hint had she dropped in her letters. He was no man of granite, to take so unexpected a blow without flinching. He looked from one to the other of them, aware that he was betraying his surprise, but utterly unable to hide it.

"I'd like to shake hands," Tregor said politely, "with the man whom Nancy has mentioned so many times."

Mechanically Wayne took the hand extended to him. As they shook, the two men looked into each other's eyes at leveled gaze. A faint shadow of a smile played on Tregor's lips. He had seen Wayne's emotion; he knew the reason. There was a hint of triumph in his smile.

They shook hands and greeted each other courteously, but the glance they exchanged was a declaration of war.

Jim stepped up and was introduced. He too saw how the land lay. His acknowledgment of Tregor's greeting was so brief and terse that Nancy looked at him sharply, frowning.

The Transcontinental pulled out, leaving the four of them standing together, the little group of onlookers a few paces aside.

Wayne felt he had to say something.

"I had the house put in shape for you, Nancy. I hired a couple of servants, too. You'll probably want to go up right now."

She nodded.

"I suppose there's something that passes for a hotel here?" Tregor asked.

"Yes, but it's not much. If you want to, you can stay with Dorval and me. We have a cabin at the edge of the lake."

"Oh, that would put you to bother," Tregor refused. "I'll tackle the hotel. Here, you smoky—"

At the gesture, the Beaver Indian stepped forward. Tregor extended a dollar bill and pointed to the grips.

"Take them to the hotel."

The Indian drew himself up and haughtily wrapped his *narkin* around his shoulders. He looked at the money scornfully, insulted by the epithet and the offer alike. On the portage path in the wilder-

ness he would carry a heavy load a mile for half of that dollar; in the white man's town he was too proud to stir a finger.

Jim grinned at Tregor's sad mistake.

"I'll take a couple, you a couple," he suggested, picking up the two heaviest. "None of these men have 'To let' signs up."

Wayne knew it was Jim's adroit move to leave him alone with Nancy. In courtesy Tregor could not refuse. He picked up his other grips, nodded and caught up with Jim. Wayne ordered the two 'breeds to take her baggage to the Arnold house. He and Nancy followed.

DESPITE the four years, Nancy seemed to have little to say. They left the station, passed the fur-trading store, the land-office, a timber-yard, the dozen houses that Valleria comprised; started up the path to the Arnold house before she spoke. And then it was a comment on the weather!

"June is a beautiful season here, Mr. Wayne. Always at this time I've been homesick for Valleria—the lake and the ranges."

Mr. Wayne! He had just called her Nancy. It was a plain hint she did not wish him to use the intimate name. He looked away, out over shimmering Lac Valleria, and wondered if he were not dreaming it all.

Nancy was speaking again. She must have known what he expected at her return. She must have seen his painful bewilderment at the station, and realized what tragic irony her homecoming had been for him. As if reading the questions in his mind, she began telling him something about Tregor; subtly explaining her relations with him. Wayne listened.

He gathered that Tregor was a mining engineer like himself, member of a college faculty, but with practical field experience too. She had met him two years ago when he was lecturing at an Eastern university. He had been acquainted with her father. He wanted to look over the mine—and visit there awhile—and—

Wayne waited for her to say frankly that she was engaged to Tregor. The question throbbed in his mind. But Nancy had learned how to dissemble. She veiled her thoughts and emotions from him.

Another strange thing in her attitude: He felt, as they walked up the path, that she was deliberately steeling herself against him. She would not speak about their two years of comradeship. She would not assume, or let him assume, that the previous intimacy had ever existed.

When he tried to remind her of it, or to call up that intimacy out of the past, she quietly interrupted with some remark not fraught with danger.

Her coldness might be due partly to Tregor's influence. But that would not explain it all. Surely she was too just to listen to malicious whisperings. Perhaps she was trying to show him from the start that she loved Tregor now. But why did she not openly say so? And why was she on her guard?

At the stone gateway she stopped.

"Mr. Tregor wants to look over the mine tomorrow morning, Mr. Wayne. I'll see you again then."

After all those years, she would not invite him in and talk a few moments at least!

"I'm rather tired," she explained, seeing his dismay.

Standing against the gateway lilacs that were a frame to her girlish body and loveliness of feature, she brought back in vivid, incarnate form, the yesteryear when their affection had been mutual. Though he stood watching her as she went up the steps and entered her old home, she did not look back.

CHAPTER II

AT the cabin Jim was sitting head in hands on his bunk, in a brown mood. In the boarded-off kitchen the Chinese cookee was shuffling about, getting supper.

One corner of the cabin was fitted up with stone chemical table, electric furnace and other apparatus. In their spare time Wayne and Jim worked out the weekly assay-sheets for the mine. Lacking money to keep a professional man, they had been forced to do it.

Jim looked up when Wayne entered. For several minutes neither man spoke.

"Say something, Wayne, for heaven's sake!" Jim burst out.

"What is there to say?"

"I guess there's nothing—nothing that would do any good. Did she tell you anything about their plans to get married?"

Married! Good God, was she really engaged to Tregor?

He wet his dry lips. "She told me nothing, Jim."

"Well, Tregor dropped a remark to me.

Meant he'd be staying at the bush Ritz till he and Nancy go to Victoria. In July, it's going to be."

Wayne caught desperately at a slender hope.

"He might have said that for my benefit, Jim."

"How's that?"

"To make me believe I'm frozen out already. I'm fighting—till I see there's no use."

Jim ground a cigarette under his heel.

"I wonder if old Polonius could have had anything to do with this affair?"

"How so? He was always friendly to me. Liked me. He never said anything when he saw Nancy and I were going together a lot. He left the whole works here in my hands, even to attorney power over the money. You can't put the blame on him; it's her choice."

"I've seen raw deals," Jim said angrily. "But nothing to compare with this one."

"There was no promise between us, Jim. I left her free."

"But good Lord, look at these four years! Three different times you could have gone out on a whopper of a salary. Or you and I could have free-lanced and made a killing somewhere. Instead of that you stuck here, slaved like ten men, didn't even take mill-hand wages, kept that damned old rock-quarry running for her sake.

"Then she comes back and says: 'Meet my friend Mr. Tregor.' If she doesn't know what you've done for her, she ought to be told. And I'm willing to tell her."

"You'll tell her nothing, Jim. I want you to promise that here and now."

"Why not?"

"It would put her under obligation to me. If she knew the truth, she'd feel she had to marry me as part of a bargain. I made the sacrifice on my own hook, without her asking me to. I've got no lien on her, Jim. She's free to make her choice. She's got to remain free."

Jim thought it over, scowling.

"I guess you're right," he said slowly. "I can't see any way around your argument. It'd be forcing her hand, and you wouldn't want her that way. I'll promise."

WHEN Nancy and Tregor came up to the mine the next morning at ten o'clock, Wayne was busy with a knotty problem at the mercury-distil retort. He quit the job at once.

Nancy's hand lay lightly on Tregor's arm, as if she meant him to be her escort. But Wayne meant otherwise. His fighting blood was up. In her estrangement toward him, in the coldness of her blue eyes, he realized that he was faced with a more bitter fight than ever the mine had given him.

"We'll begin at the beginning," he suggested, taking her by the arm and leading her toward the tunnel mouth.

They went back into the shaft to its three-pronged head and watched the "stone-hogs" drilling. They came out again, following three ore-carts, and watched the rock-breakers grind and crunch the lumps of hard rock to fragments the size of a walnut. Following the overhead traveler that took away the crushed ore, they passed next into the stamp-room.

One battery of five seven-hundred-pound hammers, at twenty strokes each minute, was beating out its monotonous, heavy rhythm, crushing the rock-fragments to powder beneath the mighty blows. The overhead traveler delivered a constant stream of rock to the stamp-head; a high-pressure spray of water played upon it between strokes; every half-minute a rocker-arm tripped up, and a tiny batch of mercury fell under the hammer, to amalgamate with the free gold of the powdered rock. From the inclined plane of each stamp-head a trough with deep copper riffles led away. In these sluices the heavy amalgam was caught, to be removed at intervals.

At the other five-unit battery Dorval, with a gang of men, was hard at work fitting new iron shoes beneath the heavy hammers. He did not stop his work or look up, though the men nodded respectfully to their boss.

He led them lastly to the mercury-distil retort and explained to Nancy the final step in extracting the pure gold. He had found out already that Tregor was no tyro at the business. He was quick and shrewd to size up the mine; he smiled at some of the queer contraptions which Wayne and Dorval had rigged up in lieu of costly machinery; he made several sensible suggestions here and there for minor changes.

If his manner had been a little less confident and masterly, or if he had uttered a word of praise for the mine's efficiency, Wayne would have respected him more.

"We'll go to the office now," he bade Wayne. "I want to see the assay-sheets and the statements."

He demanded it as coolly as if he were owner of the mine, asking a subordinate for an accounting.

In the office Wayne met something which angered him all through. His office manager, Frank Hyacinthe, had always seemed to him loyal enough—inclined to snoop a bit in other people's affairs, but efficient with his work and a valuable man. This morning however he gave his superintendent a cool nod, but bowed and scraped to Tregor.

It was easy enough to see through Hyacinthe. He was looking out for his own interests. He had seen how the land lay and who probably would be his future boss!

At Tregor's request he bustled about like the sycophant he was, bringing the assay-sheets, the quarterly balance and the wage ledger.

WHILE Tregor was glancing through them, Wayne drew Nancy aside. They stood at a window looking out over Lac Valleria to the snow-capped range rising from its western shore. From the window one could count thirty snowy peaks along the western range, and four glaciers reaching their ice fingers down toward timberline. Leagues of primitive forest—fir and cedar and hardwoods—stretched to the horizon in every direction.

A shaft of sunlight streaming through the skylight glowed on Nancy's brown hair. The softened silhouette of her forehead, lips and throat was maddening. Poignantly Wayne remembered the time, just before she left, when he and she darted across the lake in a birch canoe and climbed the highest peak, coming back in the twilight of the long June day.

He reminded her of that day, and watched her intently. She would not look at him as she answered:

"I don't remember it, Mr. Wayne."

"Nor the ring I cut from a birch marl and put on your finger?"

"No."

She did remember! No girl would have forgotten that day. It had been his most precious memory during those four lonely years. She was deliberately ignoring that past intimacy out of existence.

She led the talk to her father—a safe enough subject. Her attitude there was a thing to marvel at. A wider acquaintance with men should have opened her eyes to her father's real nature. But instead, his tragic death and the perspective of years had built up an ideal more powerful than she had held for him alive.

It was like her notion of the mine itself. She thought it a thing of gold, when it was little better than a hard-rock quarry!

In a way Wayne understood why she cherished the ideal. She had been motherless. For more than eighteen years she had been under the dominance of her father. Where a son would have rebelled against his overlordship, the daughter had accepted it. He had been the most powerful influence of her life. In the light of that, her reverence and idealization were understandable.

That ideal must be shattered some day, just as her ideal of the mine was certain to be.

Tregor stepped across to them finally.

"You probably don't want to listen to tiresome business details, Miss Arnold, when you can be looking at a scene like that. If you don't mind, Mr. Wayne and I will talk for a few minutes."

She nodded. Wayne went with her to the desk.

"If your assay-sheets are anywhere near correct, Wayne, you've been letting a lot of valuable by-products go to waste around here."

"How about the equipment to save them? It costs money that the mine hasn't got."

"You could have borrowed it. The products would have repaid it twice over."

"Borrow on what? I couldn't raise a nickel on that vein. Besides being poor stuff, it might be exhausted any day. You know the truth about this gold-mine now, as well as I do."

Tregor tossed the assay-sheets aside and picked up the wage ledger. His intentions were plain enough. He was trying to find some issue where they deadlocked. He wanted to show who was boss now of the Arnold mine.

At the top of the wage ledger was *"Stephen Wayne, Superintendent."* A row of zeros streamed across the page, broken at rare intervals by entries of twenty or thirty dollars. Tregor paused a moment, his pencil on that line.

"I suppose that posting is fact, Wayne."

"You might ask Hyacinthe. He handles all the money."

"But why?" Tregor queried, his pencil pointing to the zeros.

Wayne looked up and met his searching stare. Tregor knew that the mine had been quivering on the brink of bankruptcy, and

that a decent salary for its superintendent might have shoved it over. He knew also why that salary had been turned back during the four years.

Instead of showing a man-to-man esteem for the sacrifice, Tregor was grinning about



"That wage-sheet has to be clipped. It means a thousand dollars more profit a month."

it. His flaunt, his air of triumph, destroyed the last vestige of Wayne's respect for him.

"But why?" he repeated.

"You might ask Nancy Arnold!" Wayne whipped back. "Unless you're afraid to let her know the truth. I'm not ashamed of that page!"

Tregor went quickly to his next point.

"You're paying your workmen at least ten per cent higher wages than the average mine."

"And they're doing me ten per cent more work than the average crew."

"You can't prove that—"

"Besides, it's only decent treatment after the way they stuck by me. Take a look at last December's posting. They didn't get paid for six weeks."

"The point is,"—Tregor tapped the desk, —"most of them are married and live here. They'll have to take the cut. If any man doesn't keep up to his present standard, he can be fired off the job. That wage-sheet has to be clipped. It means a thousand dollars more profit a month."

"I don't agree to that!" Wayne said flatly. "While I'm superintendent here, wages stay where they are."

The deadlock had come!

Tregor got up, stepped over to Nancy and brought her to the desk. Wayne rose to face the crisis.

"I'm sorry to bother you, Miss Arnold," Tregor said politely, "but Mr. Wayne and I have had a little disagreement. You own this mine; I believe the decision lies with you. Wayne, you can state your case."

"That wont take long," Wayne answered bluntly. "I've been here six years; I know all my men personally. I think they're getting no more than they earn. I could argue an hour and not say more than just that. It's a matter of opinion. It boils down," he added pointedly to Nancy, "to a question of whose opinion is the more valuable in your estimation."

Nancy would not meet his eyes. She looked away from him, out of the window. Shrinking, probably, he thought, from an unpleasant thing—from a stark, face-to-face decision.

She was saved the pain of deciding then and there. The office door flung open; Dorval hurried in.

"There's a hung charge in the tunnel head, Wayne. The men are afraid to tackle it. Can't any ore come out till we fire the cussed thing."

Wayne waited a moment for Nancy to make her decision. But she did not speak. Unmistakably she felt a glad relief.

"I know you want time, Nancy," he remarked, picking up his hat. "Shall I come to your house this evening and hear what you've decided?"

She shook her head. Tregor grinned covertly at him as he turned to follow Jim out.

All that afternoon the scene in the office and the question of Nancy's choice throbbed in Wayne's mind. He wanted to tear himself away from work and find out what she had decided. But he was needed at the mill. Whatever his own personal troubles, it had to hammer on.

While the drillers sat back at a safe distance and smoked, superintendent and tunnel-master labored for five hours at the ticklish job of firing an unexploded nitro blast. A single slip, or the unexpected, would have meant the death of both. When they succeeded, near quitting-time that evening, Wayne sent Jim to the cabin. He himself started for the mercury-distil, to finish that job so the retort could be heated the next day.

At the stamp-room door he ran into a group of men spelling out a bulletin tacked up that afternoon. Their faces were long; they had no friendly greeting for him. He stepped up and read the typewritten sheet.

Above Nancy Arnold's signature was a notice that after the fifteenth of June wages would be reduced ten per cent.

LATE that evening when the twilight was changing into deep darkness, Wayne found his way up the slope to the lightning-seared pine on the knoll. He sat down at its massive foot and leaned against its shaggy, deep-seamed bark.

A thought flashed across his mind: he was like that tree—sorely stricken in its prime of life, desperately struggling to keep its vigor and raise its arms aloft in defiance of the elements.

The stars were dancing on the bosom of Lac Valleria. There was a light in Nancy Arnold's room, the room that he himself had made ready for her. The stamps had quieted down; the mine slept. From the flags at the lake edge came a chorus of "better-go-rounds" and shrill "knee-deeps." Farther out, a red-throated loon gibbered its weird night call.

On the lone pine knoll he seemed to be lifted up out of the tumult of emotions that had surged through him down below. He had found what he came seeking—the balm of a cool and quiet and lonely spot. He could think again, and see things clearly.

The last twelve years went past in solemn file. Only in two of them, the years of comradeship with Nancy Arnold, had he been happy. There were the bleak memories of his childhood back in the little Koot'n'y mining town—of his father drinking himself to death after his mother had run away with another man. Though he did not excuse his father's weakness, Wayne could understand now what his grief must have been.

There were the rough years in the mine and timber cruise before he climbed out of the dark and caught the vision of a brighter, higher life. Then restless ambition, the three brief years of sailing through the mining course at Eugene; his early work at the stamps around Juneau; the growing admiration of his brother-engineers, the brilliant prophecies they made about him.

His inspection trip to Valleria, his meeting Nancy, his fateful decision to stay there.

At Juneau he would have been a part-owner by now, and consulting expert for a dozen mines. There was no self-esteem in that thought; it was sober fact. He was poorer by several thousand dollars than when he came. Money meant nothing. It was the precious wasted years that hurt. He had laid them as a sacrifice at a girl's feet. She seemed to him now like a beautiful melody that suddenly has taken on a tragic *motif*.

Toward midnight he heard some one coming up the slope. He knew it was Dorval before a voice called through the darkness. His partner sat down beside him.

"I thought I'd find you up here," Jim said after a few moments. "I've come here myself when things were blue."

"Why, Jim," Wayne remarked sardonically, "things aren't blue now! The mine is looking right up these days. We'll be able to finance their honeymoon in grand style."

"I didn't mind working for Nancy's sake, partner," Jim went on. "I often thought what a time we four would have together when Nancy got back and I could bring Eleanor out. What hurts me worst is, Tregor'll get the benefit of all we've done. It must be that old Polonius' ghost is stalking around here, ordering things so that nobody'll be guilty of being happy. I can't see how else this could happen.

"But it's happened, Wayne," he added. "I've been thinking about it for two hours, and I can look it in the eye. Tregor has got Nancy, and I can't bring Eleanor out

this summer. The only thing left is our partnership and the future.

"We're free now to tackle the job we've been talking about for three years. Suppose we do fail at that. Then we'll hit across to Juneau or up the Cassiar. We've got the whole footstool to roam over. You can't stay here—after that notice on the mill door. The quicker you get away and begin to forget, the better it'll be for you. You'll find yourself quicker, out in the woods. Shall I go down and pack the canoe?"

Wayne took his eyes from the solitary light in the Arnold house down below.

"I want a few minutes longer here alone, partner," he said slowly.

Jim vanished down the dark path. Wayne sat silent there a little longer. Into his mind flitted an expressive phrase from the Chinook—*kopet kumtux*—to cease to know, to blot a thing out of memory as if it had never been. In one hour he could not forget her; his love was the strong, mature passion of six long years. The most he could do was to realize that he had lost her and *resolve to forget.*

He got up presently, his eyes on the light down below, but his mind back in a darkened cabin in the Koot'n'y years ago.

"If you were here, Dad," he said huskily, "you would tell me to put her out of my life and go ahead with a man's work. It is good advice. Anything else would lead—lead where your path took you. If I have strength, I will forget her."

At the cabin Jim met him.

"Everything is ready for us to start, Wayne. I knew what you'd decide."

They went down to the landing below the cabin. The canoe slipped out of the moon shadow of the shore hemlocks and pointed up the lake toward the mountains.

CHAPTER III

THIRTY-SEVEN miles north, they glided ashore the next morning just after daybreak and made camp at the mouth of a little cañon.

They set up their mosquito-proof tent, built a small stone furnace at the flap-front, lopped off a few spruce limbs to spread blankets on, and dug a basin where a trickle of water came out at the foot of the ledge.

While Jim was fitting a rod together to whip some bass out of the shore flags, Wayne glanced through the pack and found his bird-glasses. Of the hundred things which his partner might have brought instead, the glasses were what Wayne wanted the most. Always thoughtful, Jim had guessed his sore need of being alone and quiet in the mossy woods.

Thereafter Jim quietly took care of camp and cooked the meals. Very wisely he tried no hollow comforting. He spoke little, and did not once mention the purpose that had brought them there. Wayne was thankful for his silence.

He set himself grimly to the battle. He must put his love for Nancy completely behind him. He must deliberately extinguish every spark of affection for her.

There were black hours when he thought he could never shuffle off his love for Nancy. There were times when he had to meet and conquer the weakness that his father had fallen to, times when the temptation to go back to Valleria, to be near and see her, was almost more than he could bear.

Each morning while the chitter squirrels were still on their den trees, and a smoke curled up from the lake water, he stalked away from camp like a ghost in the gray light, and headed back into the lonely mountains. Through the long twenty-hour day, sometimes through day and night together, he wore out his powerful body by merciless roaming, so that rest would be welcome.

Some days found him threading the stair-step mountain streams, where the water-ouzel fed in the depths of boiling cascade pools. Other times found him above timberline in snow-fields where the gray-crowned leucosticte nested, and the golden eagle had his eyrie.

Siam-siam, the grizzly, lumbered past him in the mossy forest, crashing off when it caught his scent. Deer flushed in front of him and glanced into cover of the nearest buckbrush. Above timberline he saw the big horn pasturing his seraglio on the heather terraces, while *hyas pusspuss,* the panther, licked his chops on a ledge above them.

Wayne watched himself, as if he were some impersonal thing, analyzing the subtle, powerful influence which the wilderness had on him. In strange bird and flower there was a moment's distraction, a certain cheerfulness in the warbler's song. But the big influence lay deeper than that.

With his own life at a standstill and his

world turned upside down, it came home to him how steadfast Nature was—one certain, *inexorable* thing in a universe of uncertainties. Day after day, taking storm and sunshine alike, she marched along with mighty tread. In the face of that steadfastness, his own grief seemed small and inconsequential. He should go on with a man's work, fulfill his destiny, turned aside by neither sorrow nor gladness.

Gradually his restless energy began to awaken. His body toughened again; the signs of overwork and worry left him. Six years seemed to roll off his shoulders, now that he was free from the Arnold mine. He no longer sat out the brief nights at the lake edge alone. He went hunting and fishing with his partner, and laughed again.

Kopet kumtux—he had ceased to remember!

CHAPTER IV

AFTER three weeks of camping at the cañon mouth, Dorval judged that the time had come. One morning at breakfast he broached the purpose which had brought them to that particular spot.

They were setting themselves to a quest which had baffled a score of engineers and roving prospectors. Both of them were well equipped for the job, bringing a working knowledge of geology and chemistry and other sciences to the task. They were by easy odds the best pair of men who ever had tackled the problem, and they were true prospectors in believing they would win where others had lost.

"Suppose we sail into it today, Wayne."

"I'm ready."

"I've scouted around a bit this last week. The cañon walls are nice to work on, and I located a couple of bad landslips that read like a book."

"Did you find the formation we're looking for?"

"That's the trouble. I found it everywhere. It comes right up the east range. If it occurred only in a couple of places, we could try 'em out; but there's a fourteen-foot stratum of hard rock covering that formation. We can't dig many holes through that."

"Did you find any iron, Jim?"

"Not a trace anywhere. What's the idea of iron?"

"Well, iron lies just under the gold vein at the Arnold mine, and at a few other old ones that are deserted. I'm guessing it does up here too."

"That doesn't do us any good," Jim commented. "If the iron lies under the gold, we'd have to find the gold first anyway."

"The point is, Jim, we can't go digging into these rocks every few jumps. There's fifty square miles of country here we'd locate that lode only by a *chechahco* miracle, and miracles are poor things to bank on. We've got to locate that vein by sinking three or four holes at most. The iron will help us do that.

"If you wont laugh before we give it a fair trial, I'll tell you an idea I've been thinking over. An old sourdough across at Treadwell told me about it. I thought it was a plumb *pelton* idea at the time, but since then, I've seen several instances where it seemed to hold water."

"Shoot!"

Wayne explained.

"It surelee sounds crazy," Jim commented. "But if you say so, we'll give it a good solid crack."

They buckled on their light tump-packs, took blankets and a few cooking things, and set out up the cañon.

In the next week they returned only once to camp. For eighteen hours each day they kept hard at work, stopping to fish and cook when they got hungry, and sleeping wherever darkness found them.

Their first step was to chart a strip of country five miles wide and ten miles long, lying along the eastern shore of the lake. They marked in the cañons, hills, streams and formations. With these twenty sheets to work on, they started up at the north end of the strip and began jotting down on the maps the signs which Wayne had said to look for. Each sign was represented by a dot.

When they had finished that job and came back to camp, Wayne spread the sheets on the moss and pinned them together in the right order.

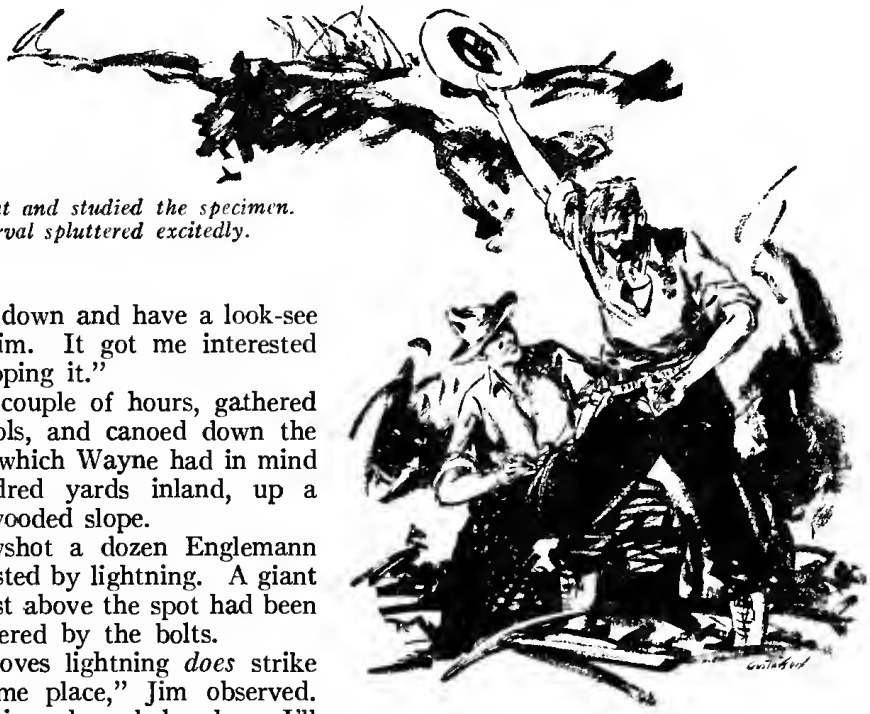
On the five-by-twenty strip of paper he had a bird's-eye view of the whole territory.

The map all over was thickly sprinkled with the sign dots. But half a mile back from the lake, and paralleling its shore, ran a narrow *path* where the black dots were markedly heavier. The strip was too clear-cut and decisive to be the work of chance.

Jim lighted a cigarette, and eyed the path of the black dots meditatively.

"Gosh, Wayne, looks like there might be something to that *pelton* idea of yours!"

Wayne pointed his rifle-barrel to a spot four miles below their camp. The black dots there were heaviest of all, nearly fifty to the square inch; and another path of them crossed the main one there at right angles.



He clambered out and studied the specimen. "Gold!" Dorval spluttered excitedly.

"We'll *cooley* down and have a look-see at that place, Jim. It got me interested while I was mapping it."

They slept a couple of hours, gathered their digging tools, and canoed down the lake. The spot which Wayne had in mind was seven hundred yards inland, up a gentle, heavily wooded slope.

Within a bowshot a dozen Englemann spruces were blasted by lightning. A giant pine standing just above the spot had been completely shattered by the bolts.

"That tree proves lightning *does* strike twice in the same place," Jim observed. "And if we find iron down below here, I'll believe the theory that, other things being equal, a lightning path follows an iron-vein."

They sunk a hole through a foot of woods humus, three feet of glacial loess and a foot of soft shale down to the hard rock beneath. They knocked out a sample of this, to determine what formation it belonged to. Then they trooped a few hundred yards south to a cañon, along whose walls they could read the story of what lay under that first rock stratum.

They found the stratum to be twelve feet thick. The formation they sought, which sometimes carried the precious vein of gold-ore, *lay just beneath it.*

All the signs were right; all pointing at that one innocent-looking spot. But Wayne snubbed his soaring hopes, and tried to keep Jim's excitement within bounds.

"We'll move the camp down here," he directed. "I'll do that while you *hyak* down to Valleria and fetch up the dynamite and drill."

The next morning at daybreak Jim came back to the new camp with a hand drill, a box of dynamite and some news.

"There's something wrong down at the old mine, Wayne. Only one battery's been running for the last five days. The drillers are working only the left tunnel."

"Maybe the crew is sore about the wage cut."

"No. Most of 'em are tied there, as Tregor said. They'll have to take what he gives 'em. It's something else."

"It's none of our concern, whatever the trouble is," Wayne rejoined.

"And another thing," Jim added. "A canoe followed me up the lake—stayed about three miles behind. I thought several times that it was dodging in and out of the bays, keeping out of my sight."

"You must be needing sleep, son! Before anyone steals our gold-mine, we'll have to find it. Better tie into this breakfast and sleep a cord or two, so you can lean heavy on the drill. While you're doing that, I'll go up and clean off some top soil."

At noon he went down, awakened Jim, and they took the dynamite and drill up to the digging. The light rotary Shamm sank very slowly in the hard diabase. By night they had put down seven holes, spooned them out, and were ready to plant the charges.

The first blast the next morning took them down eight feet. Their second, late that afternoon, took them down to the formation they sought.

Before the dirt and powdered rock had fallen, they were in the hole, digging away the débris. Wayne suddenly picked up a reddish fragment, broken loose from the bottom. He clambered out of the pit to a ray of sunlight and studied the specimen.

"Gold!" Dorval spluttered excitedly.

"Maybe. Maybe silver too. It looks like the ore down at the old rock quarry. But how rich? That's the question. Before we cut any claim-stakes, we'll find out if this vein has any size to it, and then assay the stuff."

AT different places along the slope they sank four other holes to determine the extent and thickness of the vein.

Jim summed up the results in his impulsive way:

"Ble'e me, if she assays worth a whoop, Wayne, she'll be one of the richest finds between the Cariboo and the Porcupine!"

Wayne laid his plans as they walked back to camp with a tump-pack of specimens.

"You go down, Jim, and bring up the assay outfit. I'll stay here and keep an eye on things. We've got no juice up here, so you'll have to sneak an ox' torch out of the mine to heat the crucible. Nils Andersen will let you have it, and wont spread any word. Go in and out as quietly as you can. If you leave right now, you can get there and away during the dark. There's some stray characters hanging around Valleria that I don't cotton to. Watch your step."

When Jim's canoe had disappeared down the lake, Wayne fished for a short while, then sauntered up to the diggings. He had warned Jim, not because he really suspected anything was wrong, but merely to guard against the one possibility in a thousand. But at the pit below the blasted pine he ran across a token that made him throw his rifle into his hand and glance around sharply in the shadowy woods.

In the fresh loam at the pit edge there was a man's track—a narrow, pointed-toe dress shoe.

He and Jim were wearing blunt, heavy brogans!

It might have been that somebody merely happened by and looked into the freshly dug hole out of curiosity. But any well-intentioned stranger would certainly have come on down to the camp and passed a word; the top of the tent was plainly visible. A dress-shoe in that solitude, thirty miles from a cinder walk, was enough in itself to arouse suspicion.

His thought flashed to Tregor. He put his own foot beside the track and measured. The track was much too small.

One thing was dead sure. Somebody was hanging around there in the woods spying upon the diggings—some bush sneak with no friendly purpose, watching to see if they had struck something rich. Perhaps one of the pencil-and-hatchet artists idling around Valleria had wondered where the superintendent and his tunnel-master had vanished to, and had followed Jim up the lake at his first trip.

It was a queer feeling—to know that out in the bush eyes were upon him, and that a rifle could cut him down at any moment.

Strolling away casually as if he had seen nothing, he went down to camp. While he waited that afternoon, he wrote out claim-notices and signed them for James Dorval and himself. The afternoon wore away. At dark he slipped out through the back of the tent, crawled over the moss to a windfall log, and lay behind it, listening for prowlers. He heard nothing but the better-go-rounds, the loons out on the lake, a big cat screaming up the gorge, and a porcupine gnawing his nocturnal meal from a near-by ash. At gray dawn he fell asleep for a couple of hours.

Jim was back the next mid-afternoon, his canoe drawing heavy under the weight of the assaying apparatus. Wayne met him as he pushed through the flags.

"I've got some bad news, son," he said in a cautious voice.

"So have I!" Jim countered.

BEFORE they unloaded the canoe they sat down on the bank and lighted their pipes.

"I got down there a little after dark," Jim began. "The Chink fixed me a bite to eat, and I went over to Andersen's house. Nobody else saw me. Nils said, 'Hell, yaas,' when I asked him about borrowing the torch. We went up to the tool-house and got the thing. While we were up there, he says to me:

" 'Yimmy, dey's somet'ing wrong about dis mine. We air workin' only de left tunnel, ant only half-time on dat. I went down to de office de other evenin' to ask for a new set of drill-bits, an' I hearit

Tregor cussin' to himself like a mule-whacker. I t'ink dey's somet'ing rotten in dat shaft. We rock-hogs don't know w'ot.'

"I took a lamp, Wayne, and went into the shaft for a look-see. In the center and right tunnels the last two blasts hadn't been removed. It was plain old diabase. I crawled over it and looked at the walls. You could see the fault line, where she pushed up, as plain as your nose. Hell knows where the lode is on the other side of that diabase thrust. It might be five hundred feet lower, or a mile back in the hills.

"I figured that the thrust was what made the vein get thicker these last couple months. It sort of doubled the vein back and widened it, like you blunt the end of an iron bar. There's maybe a few hundred tons of ore yet in that left tunnel, and a little clean-up back along the shaft. When that's done, old Polonius' gold-mine wont be anything but a hole in the ground."

When Jim finished, Wayne sat thinking. He was out of the mine now; the news made little difference with him. He felt sorry for Nancy Arnold, but most of his sympathy went to the men who would be thrown out of work. Many of them hadn't a penny ahead. Those who couldn't move away would be in hard lines that coming winter.

The thought struck him that he and Jim would need the whole crew at the new mine if the assay showed rich ore.

He knocked the ashes out of his pipe and glanced around. "My news is short and sweet, Jim. *We're being watched.*"

Jim sprang to his feet.

"What! How d'you know?"

"Don't yell. Sit down and act natural. I found a track up at the pit yesterday. The canoe that followed you up from Valleria the last time *was* shadowing you, after all."

"What's our next move, then?"

"We'll go right on with the assaying. I figure they're not going to get rid of us till they know for sure we've struck something rich. Otherwise they'd have bumped us off already.

"We'll make our test tonight. Whatever it shows, we'll act like it's a dud. Then, if we've got a gold vein up that slope, we'll crawl up and stake it tonight, slip away in the canoe and be at the land-office tomorrow morning. We'd better get to work now."

They carried the torch and tank, the scales, the box of chemicals, the flux material, the crucible and its muffle housing up to the tent. To eliminate any chance of a serious mistake, Wayne decided that each of them would run a separate test and compare results. Jim started his work first.

He weighed out half an "assay ton" of the ore,—a mere handful,—powdered it, and mixed it in a clay dish with test lead to alloy the gold and silver—if there were any. Over the hot torch the slag flowed to the sides of the dish; the "eye" formed in the middle and disappeared when the muffle was opened. He poured the liquid mass into a mold. When it was removed and hammered, the slag broke away like brittle glass, leaving a "button" of the alloy.

With the poor equipment he had to work slowly and carefully. It took him an hour and a half to get the alloy button.

WHEN he finished that and before he started the final process, Wayne began his test, for only one of them could work at once. By the time he was hammering out the alloy from the slag, twilight was settling down.

"Take it slow, partner," he warned, as Jim began the cupeling process. "We want it to be dark when we finish this work."

In another hour Jim straightened up from the scales. With a gesture of disgust he flung the contents of the pan into the bush.

"Hell, Wayne," he called across the fire. "A mine of that ore wouldn't pay for the roofing timber!"

Wayne looked at him sharply. Could Jim, his excitable, impulsive partner, be playing a game as cool as that, when the difference was a fortune or a hole in the ground? If he was, he was playing it so well that his own partner ten feet away could detect nothing but disgust and disappointment.

"You might have made a mistake, son. I'll see what luck I have."

He ran his test through to the end, while Jim sat on a log and smoked. Long before he finished, he saw what the result would be. Despite himself his hands trembled as he lowered the agate beam of the scales and saw the pointer creep across the notches.

But he straightened up as Jim had done,

flung pan and all into the brush and kicked over the crucible with a disgusted oath.

As he sat down on the log and filled a pipe, he exchanged a side-long glance with his partner. In a sharp whisper Jim was saying:

"I've heard of a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow, Wayne. But that's tame compared to us. We've found a pot of gold *and* silver at the business end of a thunderbolt!"

CHAPTER V

WHILE they smoked their pipes out, a mass of clouds reared up from behind the mountain range west of the lake, and hid the half-moon as they came on across the sky. The wind freshened; a few great drops of rain fell.

"Just what we need tonight, Jim," Wayne remarked in a whisper. Then aloud: "No use to sit here and mope about it. Let's go to bed and sleep it off."

Inside the tent they held a whispered conference and laid the final plans.

"For heaven's sake, be cautious!" Wayne warned. "It means our mine and our lives to boot. When you were bending over the scales, I caught a glint like firelight on a rifle-barrel out in the bushes. I was ready to kick the fire out if you miscued."

Waiting a few minutes till the rain came down in earnest and the wind drowned any noise they would make, they crept out at the back of the tent, rifles in hand, and inched away toward the slope. At its foot they rose and crept on up to the pit.

They dared not risk time or the noise of cutting stakes; these could be seen and pulled up, anyway. Wayne plucked off some birch paper from a tree. In that they wrapped the notices, lifted up the velvety carpeting of moss at three different places, and hid the notices where they were safe.

In the woods around them the lightning struck shivering close. They kept away from the deadened pine and ducked into the bushes when the woods were lit up by the flashes. The lightning, running in advance of the storm, passed on southeast in a few moments; the bolts no longer ripped the sky overhead.

They crept down the slope again; and lying behind the windfall log, they watched their camp. Wayne had no intention of going back there; but up at the pit Jim had hinted that possibly he was manufacturing a big scare out of a shoe-track and a glint in the darkness.

A leafy hardwood towering over the tent protected the fire from the rain. The burning logs flung a glow into the branches of the tree and lighted up the nearest bushes. Just as he was beginning to think Jim might be right, his eyes caught a movement in one of the junipers. He touched Jim and pointed.

A man's head and shoulders slowly emerged from the bush. For several long minutes he crouched there, peering through the flap-front of the tent. In the flickering shadows they could not make out his features, but they saw his swarthy complexion and noted his cautious, snakelike movements.

"An Indian or a 'breed," Wayne whispered. "He's not the bird who made that shoe-track. It's a two-man outfit at least. The play we staged must not have satisfied 'em. They're suspicious, or they wouldn't be spying on us like that. They'll find out shortly that we tricked 'em. If we don't want to settle this business with rifles, we'd better be halfway down the lake by the time they find out we're gone."

THEY backed away and circled to hit the lake shore three hundred yards below camp. Wading through the wind-whipped flags to the landing-place, Wayne went up after the canoe. He crawled up the bank, lifted the craft down to the water, and carried it back to Jim. They stepped in, and pushed through the flags out upon the bosom of Lac Valleria.

In less than a hundred yards they realized that the storm which had so far been their friend was now an enemy. The wind, whipping down from the mountain range and across the open water, made it unnavigable for the canoe. It was a slim, sharp-pointed craft, built for the *skookum chuck* or forest-buried river, and not for a white-capped lake.

They were baling oftener than they were paddling. Twice in the first ten minutes a curling wave slapped against the canoe and came within an ace of foundering it.

A mile below camp a little juniper island lay five hundred yards offshore. By desperate work they made the lee of it, but their canoe was half full of water. Reluctantly Wayne turned the craft toward it.

"We'll have to wait for the lake to die down, Jim. That'll be quicker than going

ashore and hitting the trail to the railroad. If we can't navigate tonight, the gentry back behind us can't either."

They landed and found a little level glade overhung by limber pine and carpeted with soft, springy moss. With the canoe over their heads they waited out the rain.

A little after midnight it stopped. Toward morning the wind quieted, the weather faired off, and the lake quickly stilled.

They launched the canoe and lost no time getting away again. Wayne turned it out into the middle of the lake, beyond reach of any rifles that might take a notion to speak from the shore. Under their sturdy paddles the canoe skimmed along at a good clip. Watching behind and seeing nothing, he felt confident that they had given their enemies the slip.

The early sun already was gilding the western shore of the lake. The water had quieted down to a silvery, mirror-placid sheet, broken here and there by leaping trout. Canvas-back and cinnamon teal skittered over the surface. Fish eagles on snags along the shore *chak-chaked* to one another.

Eight miles below the camp, a headland stood out into the lake. As they danced down toward it, sheering off a little to keep away from its point, Wayne saw Jim suddenly stiffen, his paddle upraised for a stroke. He looked ahead.

A canoe, larger than their own, with three men in it, was darting from the point of land to *head them off.*

JIM turned around. His face was a trifle pale, but his voice was steady enough:

"There's our friends, Wayne, blocking the road. They've got one rifle on us. What's the call?"

Wayne looked at the enemy canoe for a moment, thinking swiftly.

"We could get ashore, I guess. But I'd rather meet an Indian or a 'breed on open water like this than in the woods. We'll stay out here and settle the dispute. It's been drifting toward a rifle argument for the last three days.

"Put down your paddle, Jim; I'll do the maneuvering. That .300 of yours is good at long range. I'll keep us back away from them and give you a chance."

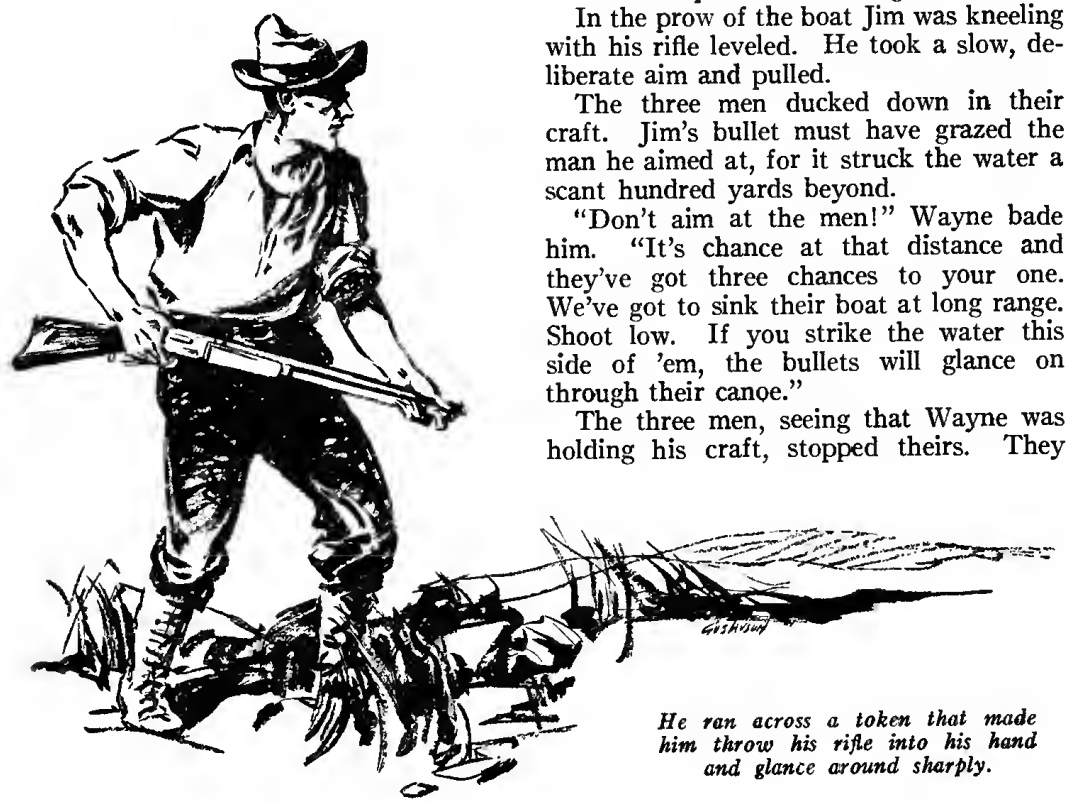
The two craft glided within a long rifle-shot of each other. A gun barked; a bullet whistled over Wayne's head. He crouched lower, steadying the canoe with the paddle so that his partner could sight.

In the prow of the boat Jim was kneeling with his rifle leveled. He took a slow, deliberate aim and pulled.

The three men ducked down in their craft. Jim's bullet must have grazed the man he aimed at, for it struck the water a scant hundred yards beyond.

"Don't aim at the men!" Wayne bade him. "It's chance at that distance and they've got three chances to your one. We've got to sink their boat at long range. Shoot low. If you strike the water this side of 'em, the bullets will glance on through their canoe."

The three men, seeing that Wayne was holding his craft, stopped theirs. They



He ran across a token that made him throw his rifle into his hand and glance around sharply.

fired all three at once. One bullet clipped through the canoe, luckily up at the gunwale. Another sang past Wayne's ear.

Jim answered with the four shots in his magazine, as fast as he could work the bolt. Two bullets glanced off the water and tore through the canoe, high up. A third was a clean miss. The fourth hit the canoe squarely at the wind-water line.

The man nearest the hole lunged forward and put his hand over it. The man in the middle slashed off a square of canvas and passed it to him.

"Twice more like that one, Jim, and they'll be swimming like muskrats in these twelve feet of water," Wayne encouraged him. "Give it to 'em while they're broadside on."

Jim clipped in five cartridges and raised the rifle. Before he could shoot, the three men fired again. The paddle in Wayne's hand was knocked out of his grasp. A bullet sprayed Jim with water and tore through the canoe at his feet. He emptied his magazine at the enemy. One bullet at the wind-water line again—ripping a hole as big as a fist. The others were through the boat, but high.

WAYNE reached forward for the other paddle and backed the canoe off as Jim reloaded. The three men, guessing where he was aiming, whirled their craft and presented only its narrow prow. When they had mended the boat again, it began creeping forward to force the battle.

Small as the prow of the canoe was, Jim hit it twice low down with his next five shots. Wayne kept backing away. His partner plainly could outshoot them. A few more exchanges like that, and they would be swimming.

They must have realized that they stood a poor chance at that range. In spite of all that Wayne could do, they closed up. They were not shooting now; they made no effort to patch their boat. They meant to finish the argument first.

Twice Jim emptied his magazine at them as they glided nearer across the water. At the sharp crack of his rifle the three men ducked low. With the boat unsteady beneath him, his aim was poor. His bullets whizzed over or struck to one side of them. The enemy did not answer. Steadily their canoe cut down the intervening space.

Wayne dropped his paddle and caught up his own heavy rifle. He steadied the canoe with a hand on the gunwale, and bade Jim hold his fire. Lying full length in the bottom of the boat, resting rifles on their palms, they waited.

At four hundred yards the men in the other boat quit paddling. Their momentum kept them gliding gently closer. Their craft swerved slightly, touched by a whisper of breeze. An arm over the side attempted to point it straight again, but failed. At three hundred yards it had turned to a half-broadside. Wayne cocked his rifle.

"Now!"

At the same instant his gun and Dorval's cracked. He saw puffs of smoke from the other boat. His hat was knocked off his head into the water. He was blinded for a moment with spray that a slug kicked up. He clipped in a fresh magazine and poured a stream of bullets at the boat, shooting as fast as he could crook trigger-finger.

One way or another, in ten seconds, the arbitrament of rifles would be settled.

One of the three men in the other canoe leaped up and fell limply across the gunwale. Jim's rifle was hit, as he reloaded, and its bolt action shattered. He flung it down and whipped out his belt-gun—useless at that distance. Against two rifles Wayne was shooting desperately, aiming point-blank at the boat, not daring to take better aim.

As he poured another magazine of bullets at the enemy canoe, he saw its side cave suddenly in, as if the middle rib had been smashed. It rocked a moment. He heard a yell as it filled and capsized, throwing its occupants into the water.

He brushed a hand across his eyes and watched. Only one man came up. He trod water for a bewildered moment, saw the canoe and his two foes, and started swimming for the point of the headland.

His strokes were slow and labored. He never would make it.

The hole at Jim's feet was shooting water into the canoe; it was flooded a couple of inches deep already, and threatening to sink. Wrapping a cartridge in his handkerchief, Jim plugged the hole as best he could.

With his eyes on the swimmer struggling desperately, Wayne caught up his paddle and whirled the canoe around. Jim looked up at him.

"What's the idea?"

"That bird can't make it ashore. He'll go down in fifty yards."

"Well?"

"We'll pick him up."

"We will like hell!"

"Cool down, partner. You wouldn't like to remember watching a man drown. We want to find out the who and why of this affair, besides. Maybe we haven't got all of them."

In spite of Jim's angry objection, he drove the canoe toward the swimmer.

Before they could reach him the man went down.

With a powerful back-stroke, Wayne stopped the canoe and hovered over the spot, peering into the blue water. Against the clean sand bottom he made out the blurred form of the man, fighting desperately to rise again, his water-soaked clothes dragging him down.

Twice he kicked up within a few feet of the paddle thrust at him, but in his wild thrashing missed and sank again. Wayne could see him pawing frantically at the sand bottom.

The sight was more than Wayne could endure. He kicked off his shoes, stripped off his coat and dived overboard.

When he came up again, with a hand twisted in the coat collar of a limp form, Jim was in the stern ready to help. He grasped his partner's hand, and guided it to a clutch on the gunwale.

"Don't try to board!" he ordered, grabbing up the paddle. "We'd capsize sure. I'll tow you both ashore."

A ten-minute battle, and the water-logged canoe touched the point of the headland. Wayne dragged his man out of the water, spread-eagled him, and dropped down to work him back to consciousness.

"Good Lord, Jim," he burst out at sight of the man's face. "It's Frank Hyacinthe!"

THE office manager was sitting up in a few moments, but dazed and groggy still. He looked around him at the lake, the tongue of land, the upturned canoe. Then his eyes fell on Wayne, wringing the water from his clothes. He realized where he was and what had happened.

His eyes could not meet Wayne's. The red flush of shame spread over his pinched, blue face. His head bowed. He did not once look up again.

"*I would,* you dirty skunk!" Jim rasped at him.

Wayne put on his clothes and sat down in front of his former office manager. Never in all his life had he seen a man so stricken with shame.

"We'll talk now, Hyacinthe. Don't try to lie or be bashful with information. Who were your friends out there?"

Hyacinthe did not take his eyes off the ground, but he answered readily enough:

"They were two Blackfeet 'breeds that have been hanging around Valleria."

"Real nice company for you to be loping the bush with! Wasn't it your shoe-track I saw up at our test hole—a small, pointed shoe?"

"Yes."

"How did you and your friends happen to slide out from this headland and cut us off? We thought we'd given you the slip."

"One of the 'breeds looked in your tent last night. You two were not there. I guessed you outwitted me. Then we found your canoe was gone. I guessed you'd have to go ashore in that wind. We carried our boat down the trail and waited."

"Sounds like you were the brains of this bush-sneak party. The 'breeds did the spying and you sorta managed them. Is that right?"

"It's—true."

"Did we get all your gang? Any more hanging around in the bush up there?"

"No, the two 'breeds was all."

"How did you know where we were in the first place?"

"I'd heard you and Dorval talking about that vein maybe cropping out again up the east range. The Chink told me you'd gone away in a canoe. When Dorval came back for the dynamite and drill, I had the 'breeds follow him and spot your camp."

"All right. We've got the surface facts; now we'll dig a little deeper. I had my eyes opened to you down in the office several weeks ago when you switched affections to Tregor. I can understand your wanting to own a nice rich discovery claim that some one else discovered—wanting it so bad you were willing to shoot two men you'd worked with for several years.

"But what I can't understand is this: You never struck me as being a self-starter, Hyacinthe. You always seemed to drift with the main breeze. All right for office work, handling a pencil; but no good where initiative was needed. To find you up here managing a *coup* like this, handling a rifle —it's got me suspicious. Open up!"

"We planned it together. I arranged most of the details, because he is a *che-chahco* in the bush. We were to go fifty-fifty—"

"We?"

"Yes—Tregor and me."

Jim sprang up from the canoe as if he had been prodded. Wayne merely grinned.

"Sit down, son," he bade Dorval. "This is just getting interesting. It was worth diving into the river for. Tregor was playing pretty heavy stakes, wasn't he, Hyacinthe?"

"He had to do something. The mine—"

"We know all about the mine playing out. Go right on. He was up a stump and had to rob somebody, but why did he pick on Jim and me in particular?"

"He knew you two are experts. He heard the rumors about this vein up the east range. He knew you'd find it if anybody could. He didn't have any particular love for you, and besides—"

"Besides what?"

"He was afraid of you."

"Afraid of me! I walked off without making any trouble, and left him have the Arnold mine."

"It wasn't that. It was Miss Arnold."

"What about her? Where does this 'afraid' come in there?"

"He was afraid you might get her, after all."

Afraid he might get her after all! Heavens and earth, didn't Tregor have her already?

"You mean he was afraid that if I struck a discovery that made me rich, she might —might change her mind?" asked Wayne.

"I don't think the possibility of a rich discovery had anything to do with his fear. It was you *personally*. I believe he didn't like the idea of your being around Valleria. To say it straight out, I believe he wanted to get rid of you for good and all."

"What makes you think that?"

"I wouldn't blame you for calling me a liar, but I hung back from—from using rifles on you and Dorval. I argued I could beat you to the land-office and get the claim. I said it would be a lot surer than a fight with you. But he insisted you should be killed. That's why we came out at you on the water, when we had an eight-mile start."

"It turns out you were correct on that count," Wayne observed dryly. "So he insisted on bumping me off! I don't understand him there. After the proof she gave him of her choice, did he still think I might beat him?"

"I guess—he must have."

"Why?"

"I don't know what their relations were —I mean how sure he was of her. I'm only guessing. He asked me about those two years when you and Miss Arnold were together. I told him I thought she liked you and was, I think I said, *engaged* to you before her father's death."

"Aren't they planning to get married?"

"Yes, it is set for next week."

"He should have left well-enough alone," Wayne commented. "He hadn't—and hasn't—any grounds to be afraid of me. Is that all you know now about this whole transaction?"

"It's all I know."

WAYNE got up and stepped a few yards aside with Dorval.

"The question is, Jim, what're we going to do with Hyacinthe?"

"Turn him over to Corporal Clark!"

"But see here: Ten chances to one, the real skunk didn't commit himself in this affair. There's no material evidence against him; you can bank on his seeing to that. We've got the stuff on Hyacinthe, his tool, but nothing on Tregor. He'd probably succeed in lying completely out of it. Hyacinthe would have to pay for him."

"He deserves to. Let him. Let him get soaked hard."

Wayne thought a moment. His partner usually listened to reason, but he was mad all through now.

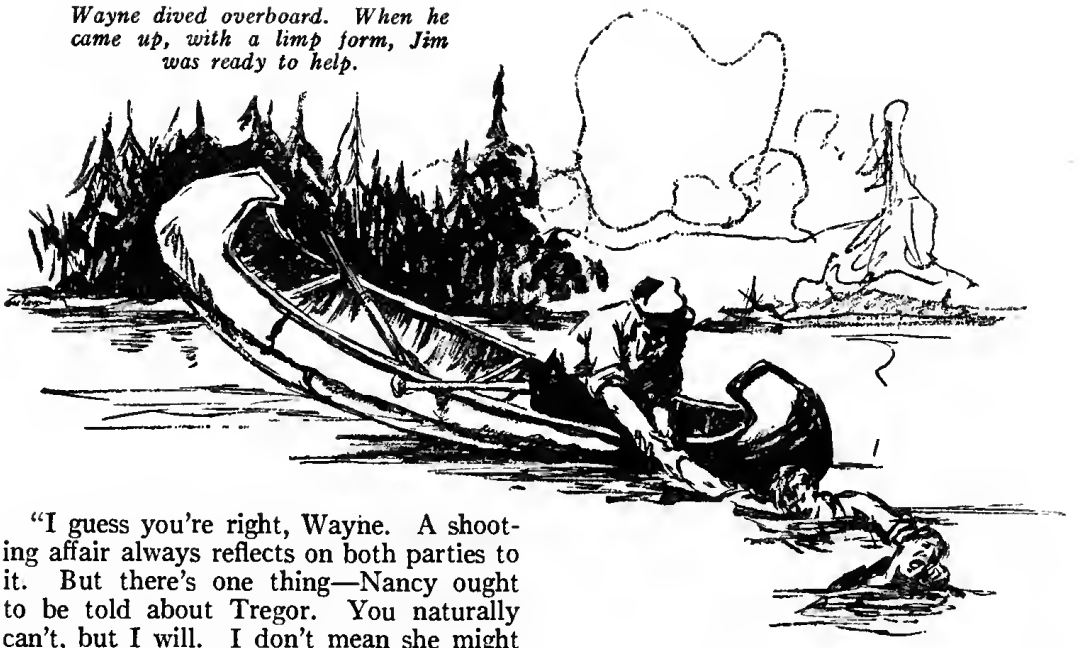
"Jim, suppose you had spied on a man, tried to murder him, and got licked. Suppose he pulled you out of the water, chewed the rag a few minutes, and then *let you go*. What would you do?"

"I'd go shoot myself."

"Exactly. Hyacinthe wont do that; he hasn't got your nerve. But he's got a sense of shame, just as you have. Take a look at him there. What I'm driving at, if you want to soak him, and *soak him hard,* let him go.

"But that's only a side argument. It's to our advantage not to turn him over to the Mounted. See here, we don't want to get messed up in an affair like this. Men would say, 'Uh-huh! Bad blood between them over the girl! That claim-snatching is just Dorval's and Wayne's version!' I'm not anxious to have my name connected with a shooting-party. Better just keep it quiet. We can do that. Nobody but the Devil will ever miss these two 'breeds, and he'll know right where they are."

Jim scowled at Hyacinthe a little while before he answered:



Wayne dived overboard. When he came up, with a limp form, Jim was ready to help.

"I guess you're right, Wayne. A shooting affair always reflects on both parties to it. But there's one thing—Nancy ought to be told about Tregor. You naturally can't, but I will. I don't mean she might swing back to you if she knew about him. For her own sake—" He broke off abruptly. "Hell, I can't keep from liking her, Wayne, in spite of everything! I'd hate to think of her marrying a *carcajou* like him."

Wayne tried to think of her impersonally, as he would think of any other girl. Tregor would probably walk the straight and narrow after this sharp lesson. If she loved him, she would be happy with him anyway. They would go back to the East together. The whole sorry affair would be smoothed out.

"It works both ways, Jim," he said presently. "In my case, she was a grown woman, making her own choice. In this case she has to be too. She had a couple years to judge me, and a couple to judge Tregor. She made her choice when she signed that wage-cut.

"But I wont be unjust. I'll do for her what I'd do for any girl. We've got to protect her as much as we can. When you go down, go and see Tregor. Tell him we're hep to his whole trick. Throw a scare into him. Tell him we're going to keep an eye on him, and if he doesn't toe the line from now on, we'll dig up old bones."

"It's your concern," Jim agreed reluctantly. "If that's how you feel about it, I'll tell her nothing."

AT beginning of twilight that evening Wayne was in camp watching through a screen of spruce boughs for his partner's return. Taking Hyacinthe along, Jim had gone down to register the claim, bring up grub supplies and get surveying instruments.

With two rifles and two paddles no longer needed, Wayne had walked back up the shore trail to keep an eye on the discovery and do some of the preliminary work before the inevitable rush of prospectors and speculators.

During the day he had roughly staked out plots of the level shore terrace for the mill site and the homes of the workmen. Already he had formed plans of dredging a channel into the lake bank so that a barge could bring up machinery and other things from the railroad. Up the lake half a mile, away from the bustle and noise of the stamps, he had staked a little glade where he thought Jim would want to build his home and Eleanor's.

With one exception, the whole outlook was roseate. That one exception Wayne would not admit to himself, though all the other things were trivial in comparison with it.

While he was staking Jim's home in the glade, he had tried to whistle unconcernedly, but could not. The challenge to his energy that lay ahead of him in erecting the mill, the pleasure of having his old crew back with him again, the pride of owning his own mine, the certainty of splitting a fortune with Jim Dorval—all of it left him strangely cold. . . . .

Down the lake the canoe came in sight. Three hundred yards away, Jim shouted and waved a paper, in token that the claim was theirs. Wayne met him and carried the instruments to the tent.

"Did you see Tregor?"

"I did that. I looked him in the eye for ten minutes. He promised everything. I think you sized him up right, Wayne. He was in a desperate pinch. He saw a chance to get a mine and be rid of you at one crack. It's his first misstep; he may toe the line from now on. But—there's a canoe coming up the lake."

"More bush-sneaks?"

"No. It's—Nancy."

Wayne dropped the instrument he was adjusting. "Did you tell her?"

"I did not. I didn't even see her while I was there."

"Then what's she coming for?"

"How do I know?"

IN a few minutes more the second canoe came slipping up the shore along the flags. Attistah, the Beaver guide, was paddling it, kneeling Indian-fashion in the stern. In the twilight Wayne made out a girlish figure sitting in the middle.

"If you don't want to go through with it, partner," Jim ventured, "I'll stay here and meet her."

"I'd rather she hadn't come," Wayne answered quietly. "But sometime or other I'd meet her and have to go through with it. It had better be now."

Jim walked aside as the canoe slipped in through the flags and touched the bank. Attistah stayed in it. Nancy came up alone to the tent.

She was dressed in the woods clothes she had worn that day he cut the birch-marl ring for her. It struck Wayne oddly. At first, in his bitterness, he wondered why. A deliberate attempt to bring back the two sunlit years, to appear to him as she had been then, to gain whatever she had come for?

Then he realized that on the long canoe-trip she had honestly needed them.

She stopped a few feet from him, leaning against the moss-clad trunk of the hardwood. She was breathing quickly; he could see the tie throbbing up and down on her breast. He steeled himself against a maddening impulse to go up and take her in his arms. He had fought out that battle weeks ago.

For several moments she did not speak. It seemed to him she was leaning against the massive trunk for support and strength. They were looking into each other's eyes. There was no dissembling, no studied poise in her words or mien now. In the swift tense scene between them, all pretense and evasion dropped.

"I've heard about my worthless mine, Stephen Wayne."

"I'm sorry. I expected the end to come any time."

"I know what you did there those four years. I know all the—the sacrifices. I heard about the offers you turned down at other places. When you weren't even taking a salary for yourself, I was writing letters about—about the money you sent to me. I remember one; it was criminal."

"Don't be unjust to yourself, Miss Arnold. You didn't know."

"Why didn't you tell me?"

"I didn't want to put you under obligations."

"But why did you sacrifice yourself and waste all those years?"

"You might guess why."

"But will you tell me why—from your own lips?"

Why was she wanting to be told something that she had known for six years?

"If you had come back alone," he said frankly, "I would have been repaid a thousand times. That's why."

Her cheeks flushed. She looked away from him while she spoke:

"I suppose—it is too late—to repay you —now."

She was offering herself to him! That had been the purpose of her visit. She had led directly to it. She had asked his avowal of love so that she could offer herself without shame.

Her part of the bargain! She was carrying it through, as he had known she would. He gave bitter thanks that he had done the honorable thing in leaving her free to make her choice.

He did not answer her last words. She took a step forward, looked up at him. For a moment her eyes clung desperately to his.

She turned away from him, as if to leave, but checked herself. Her voice was low and spiritless when she spoke again:

"I heard about your discovery here, Stephen. I thanked God for it. You went on with your work and forgot me, as you should have done, instead of yielding to any—any weakness. It seemed you came into your own the moment you broke away from that mine—and all its influence. It seems my father was your enemy in all he did. Wont you take the machinery from my mine and use it here? It's a poor payment, but it's all I've got."

"Yes, it's all you've got. That's why I can't take it, Miss Arnold. Tregor can dispose of—"

"I heard about Tregor, too. You would have kept me in ignorance about him trying to kill you and Jim."

"Who told you all these things?"

"Frank Hyacinthe. He came to me down there after Jim released him. He told me the story of those four years—and all about his dealings with Tregor."

"Why?"

"It was from gratitude to you, Stephen. He said he would give everything he had on earth to be back working for you. He knew I'd never let Tregor see me again. He thought I'd come up here to you when I knew the truth. He didn't suspect that you no longer—wanted—wanted—"

"What made Tregor so anxious to kill me, Miss Arnold? When you sided with him in that wage-cut—"

"I was led to sign it. He knew that."

"Led? You were free—"

She made a gesture of dissent.

"I've been led all my life!" she interrupted bitterly. "You treated me just as my father did, Stephen. You kept me in ignorance, and let me go on playing these four years when I should have been here with you. He kept me in ignorance, and continued to rule my choice of this and that. I hardly had a mind of my own. Tregor, like you and my father, laid a sheet of paper in front of me and told me to sign. I knew what it meant, but I wasn't free.

"I wasn't free—not till I started up here to see you and ask to pay you. That was the first free thing I've done in all my life."

The blood was hammering madly through Wayne's head. The first free thing—did it mean she came not from a sense of duty, of her deep obligation to him, but because she loved him?

He went up to her and laid his hand on her arm.

"Nancy, look at me. You'll tell me the God's truth. There is only one question between us now. When you came here with Tregor, before you found out what I'd done these four years, were you engaged to him?"

He could see the word, "No," fashioning itself upon her lips. She tried to utter it but could not. He knew from her eyes it would have been a lie. His hope died. His hand dropped from her arm.

SHE turned away from him and went blindly down toward the canoe. Wayne did not follow. He stood watching, silent. He thought that once she stopped and looked back at him; but in the evening gloom of the junipers, he could not be sure. She reached the canoe, crouched down in it; the Indian skirled it out upon the lake.

In the deepening twilight it faded out of his sight while he still could hear the swish of the paddle. When that too had gone, he leaned against the mossy hardwood, staring at nothing save the bleak years ahead.

He knew now the battle with himself, the battle to forget her, had never been won. He had been deluding himself. He could not forget, could never put her out of his life. The mere sight of her had roused all the old fierce longing which he thought he had put down. Her presence was like a subtle perfume; against it resolve and steeled will were powerless.

Jim stepped back into camp. For a silent moment or two he looked at the gray, drawn face of his partner.

"I couldn't help hearing part of it, Wayne," he spoke up. "I wonder if you did the right thing?"

"She came back engaged to Tregor," Wayne said dully. "You can't get around that. She admitted it."

"But wait a minute. I think I see this whole thing now; I didn't see it before she came, or I'd have spoken up then. I want to remind you of something. You told me several times that her father's influence was the most powerful thing in her life. That's what she was driving at a minute ago when she said she'd been led to do this and that. She was telling the truth when she said that coming up here was the first free thing she'd done in all her life."

"But she came back—"

DORVAL stopped him. "I know what you're going to say. She came back here intending to marry Tregor. That's true. She deliberately tried to put you out of her life. That's true too. But why?

"While we were going down the lake, Hyacinthe gave me an earful. That snoop knows everything, and he was so grateful to you that he spilled all he knew.

"Old Polonius put one over on you, Wayne. He slipped you a mean one, boy. That's what she was driving at when she said he was your enemy. You think he liked you. He did, as far as the mine

work went. But *no farther*. He was shrewd enough to be double-faced, and you not know it.

"When he saw you and Nancy getting thick, he investigated you. I hate to say it, Wayne, but your dad and mother were against you. When old Polonius found that out! You know he had a mind harder'n Plymouth Rock, and queer notions about genteel blood. Friendship or his debt to you didn't stop him from slipping you a mean one. You weren't any husband for his daughter! Like father, like son—that's what he thundered at Nancy, and his word was law to her. In her eyes, when you didn't give in like your dad, you proved old Polonius' hereditary taint was a damned lie! Don't you realize that was what she was driving at?"

Wayne whirled upon him.

"You're lying! You want to see me marry her—"

"Easy, Wayne—I'm not through yet. Here's some more: He practically arranged her marriage with Tregor. He gave her a flat order not to have anything to do with you. That was in his will. Imagine what it meant to her just after his death! You can blame her, if you want to, for obeying him—for bringing Tregor back with her, treating you cold as a sort of self-protection, forcing herself to something she shuddered at. But d'you realize, Wayne, that when she came up here and offered herself to you, she broke away from her father and defied him? Why? She couldn't tell you in three words, after you'd refused to—to be paid!"

WAYNE leaned against the tree. His brain whirled giddily. In the tumult of his emotions one thing stood out very clearly: Hyacinthe the snoop had saved him from a horrible mistake—if it were not too late now.

"I didn't believe it myself, Wayne," Jim added. "I thought Hyacinthe was stringing me. I didn't believe the old *pater familias* would do you a trick as mean as that. But when I heard what she told you, that proved it. What are you going to do about it?"

Wayne turned swiftly and made for the canoe.

He sensed, rather than saw, that Jim was hurrying after him and getting into the boat.

"We can catch 'em, Wayne," he said softly, "before they pass the island."

Wayne did not answer. He was dipping his paddle blade-deep and peering ahead into the purple twilight.

Within a mile they came in sight of the Indian's canoe, and overhauled it rapidly.

"It may be, Jim,"—Wayne turned his head around,—"it may be that Nancy and I will go down the lake together. If we do, you hurry on ahead with the Indian. I want you to catch Frank Hyacinthe. He's had his lesson. Tell him if he wants his old job back, he can have it."

"Good heavens!" Dorval gasped. "And shall I give Tregor your love?"

As they drew near, they saw Nancy still crouched down in the middle of the canoe, her head bent in her arms. As they came closer still and drew alongside, he saw that she was weeping bitterly. At the camp she had kept her self-control, but her courage had utterly broken as she started back on the lonely trip to Valleria.

Wayne took things in his own hands; they had drifted long enough.

"Get into this boat!" he ordered the Indian. "You, me, change places. You go down lake with Dorval."

The Indian looked at Nancy. At the unexpected sound of Wayne's voice, she glanced up, startled. She turned her head away and tried to dash the tears from her eyes.

Bewildered by his order, she did not know what to say. Wayne and Attistah changed places.

"Now paddle!" Jim bade the Indian.

Their canoe vanished.

Wayne headed his craft for the island shore a hundred yards away. When it touched, he stepped out and drew it alongside a rock.

"Nancy!"

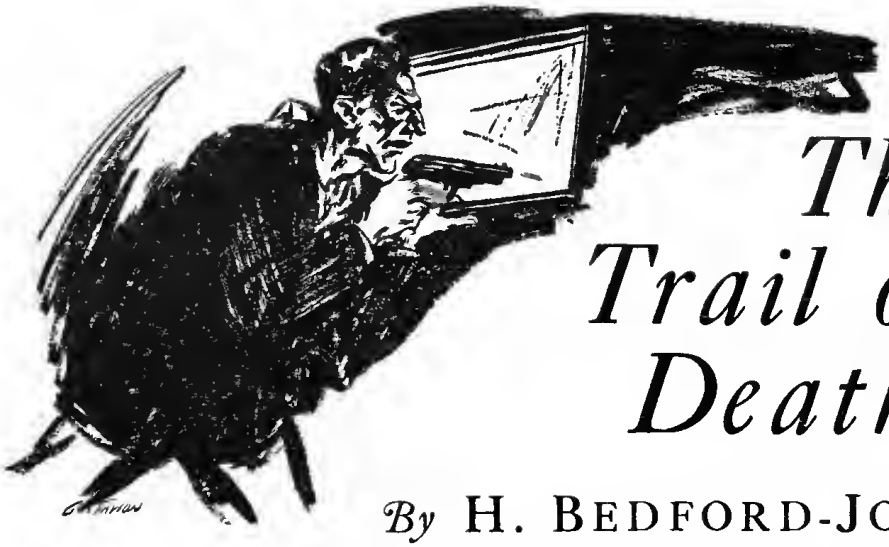
She had buried her face in her arms again. She did not look up or answer. For a moment he leaned over her, not daring to touch her. Then he stooped swiftly, picked her up in his arms, and carried her ashore to a seat on a mossy rock in the glade of limber pines.

"What we've been looking forward to for years, Nancy, is ours now—if you'll forgive me."

"But you—you refused!" she sobbed. "You didn't want to be paid!"

Wayne brushed the past aside with a single question: "Are you glad I came?"

He waited till she turned her face up to him. Her arm went around his neck in answer.



With a wild laugh, he thrust out the pistol and fired.

The Trail of Death

By H. BEDFORD-JONES

"Over Abbeville," the second in this remarkable series, includes one of the most unusual and exciting scenes ever described—a fight to the death waged in the narrow cabin of a London-to-Paris passenger plane.

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

DURANT stood at the rail, watching the gleam of the Land's End light twinkle across the night. The *Tyrania* was on the last leg of her voyage; at dawn she would be just off Plymouth, and all those who could change at the last moment would go into the lighter instead of on to Cherbourg, for dirty weather lay ahead of her. Durant had changed, but for other reasons.

A light step, and Durant turned to find the slender figure of Baroness Glincka at his side. Known aboard ship as Mrs. Robinson, her unhappy story was hidden with her name; only Durant knew how her dead husband's cousin, Boris Makoff, held her gripped in tentacles of blackmail, forcing her to aid his little schemes, making her an unwilling but helpless member of his Paris coterie of genteel crooks. It was for her sake that Durant had wormed his way into this organization, getting the confidence of Makoff—waiting!

"You got the message?" she asked in the darkness.

"Yes, and changed. You'll get off at Plymouth too?"

"Yes. Boris is planning something at London, before going on. I'm not sure what; but the victim is that white-haired man who keeps to himself. Larson, the name is. Boris introduced him to me tonight, using my real name. He's a nice old man."

"And a game's on, eh?" Durant knew Larson by sight—a stiff, bronzed man with white hair and mustache, and shrewd, kindly old eyes, traveling alone.

"Something. Boris wants you to come into the smoking-room, and meet Larson. I think he's a Dane who's made a fortune in America and is taking a trip to Denmark—that's my guess. I suppose Boris means to wring his neck in London by your help and mine."

"Pleasant prospect," said Durant.

"What will Lewis say when he learns the truth?"

"He wont learn it. I've arranged—at a little expense. You'll see in the morning."

"Then you're a magician!"

"Borrowed magic—from your beauty."

SHE laughed a little and was gone into the darkness. Durant stared out at the gleaming light on the horizon, and thought over the past, back to those Paris days when he, a clerk in an American branch bank, poor, half-starved, struggling for life and health, had seen the beautiful Bar-

oness Glincka come in three times a week to the next window.

And now he knew her, was fighting for her—was a crook for her sake! An odd turn of destiny. An almost forgotten relative dead, a legacy of almost forgotten land in Florida, a trip home—wealth! Then he headed back for Paris, to take his ease where he had starved and fought and sweated. So he had thought—but work had come to him.

"That you, Durant?" It was the voice of Lewis, who came quietly out of the darkness, a cigar-tip glowing redly. "First sight of England, eh? I'm leaving you in the morning."

"But I'm going up to London too, instead of on to Cherbourg."

"Good! Shall I see you in London?"

"No. Wiser not—wait for Paris."

"Right. I'll give you my address there. I'm going right on—taking the afternoon plane over tomorrow."

Lewis fumbled for a card-case. He was a smallish man, very alert—a wholesale druggist from the Middle West, now engaged in smuggling a suitcase filled with cocaine into France—a task in which Durant presumably was aiding. True, Durant had saved him from Boris Makoff, had dumped the cocaine into the Atlantic and substituted baking soda for it—and for these services, known and unknown, Lewis was an ally. Once in Paris, he promised to be a most important ally.

"Thanks." Durant took the card thrust at him. "You'll hear from me as soon as I get settled—if not before! I've a rather big game to pull off, and there'll be pickings in it. They'll go to your friends who help me. I'm not in it for money."

He did not say that he was not in it for crooks' money—he had no intention of injuring the feelings of Lewis just yet. The two men separated, and Durant headed for the smoking-room, filled to bursting with the usual last-night crowd.

Makoff had a table and lounge in one corner; with him was the silent, rather offish Larson—impeccably dressed, as usual, and only a little less lonely. Helen—or Baroness Helena Glincka—had rejoined them and was drawing Larson into almost lively conversation. Cards lay waiting on the table.

DURANT approached, saw Makoff make a remark, saw the eyes of Larson sweep to him with almost eager interest. He could not understand it, but came up to the table. Makoff rose.

"Ah, Durant! Let me introduce you to Mr. Larson of Toledo—Mr. Durant. What about a rubber, if your packing's done?"

"Glad." Durant bowed to the Baronne, and shook hands with Larson, in whose mild blue eyes rested that same curious, scrutinizing expression. Then and later his manner toward Durant was almost deferential, though as a rule his air was brusque enough. That he was quite captivated by the Baronne, too, was soon evident.

There was no opportunity for private conversation until, a few rubbers ended, Helen departed under pretense of having to pack. Larson also rose, and shook hands with Durant.

"If you're alone," he said, "we might go to London together in the morning."

"I'll be glad," said Durant, finding himself liking the old man. "See you at the pier, eh?"

So they parted. Left alone, Durant met the gaze of Makoff with inquiring eyes.

"Well? What's the game?"

The bold, aggressive regard of the Russian dwelt upon him for an instant, and in those dark depths Durant read startling, baffling things.

"Tell you later," said Makoff calmly, with a gesture at the room. "Get up to London with him, ask him to visit you for a day or so—until Monday, say. The week-end. Tell him your car will meet the train."

"My car? But I haven't any!"

"Your mistake," said Makoff, and smiled. "Your chauffeur, Giles, will meet the train." And this was all he would say.

IN the drizzling rain of a dark gray dawn, the *Tyrania* disembarked her passengers into the lighter, while the rattling, banging winches sent aboard the nets of hold luggage. Durant stood in the rain on the upper deck of the lighter, watching.

"I've been looking for you." The Baronne emerged from the cabin, joined him. Her face was pale, anxious, her sky-blue eyes wide and filled with alarm. "I've learned what's up—"

Durant, touching his hat, turned suddenly to the rail. "Look!" he broke in. There was a swift commotion forward—angry cries, orders, a medley of voices. One of the nets had just come down.

"What is it?" she demanded, frowning at the rain-wet scene. Durant laughed.

"That," he said, "is the pet suitcase of our friend Lewis going over the side. It's gone! Here's the sequel." And he opened his hand to show a twenty-pound note. "But you were going to say—"

She came close to him. "I've found out about it," she said rapidly in French. "I think Larson's to be murdered—I'm not sure. He's carrying a large sum—got it from the purser—in cash."

"I'll take care of it," said Durant, and took her hand. He smiled into her eyes. "Out of the rain, now! All's well that ends well. *Au revoir!*"

The last Durant saw of Lewis, the little rascal was involved in heated argument at the Customs shed with sundry porters. Durant laughed and passed on. His own trail was covered; the cocaine and substitute alike were gone; and the past was closed. The future remained.

CLOSETED in a first-class compartment with Larson, Durant arranged about breakfast, took his companion into the restaurant car, and thawed him out in no time. Returning, they lighted cigars and became more or less confidential. Durant found himself treated with the same curious interest he had noticed the previous evening, but could not penetrate to the reason.

Larson was shyly eloquent regarding the Baronne. A shrewd old man, manufacturer and banker, he was yet in some ways diffident and unsophisticated as a child—and Makoff had obviously found the way, though Durant was slow to realize just where it lay. Comprehension came slowly.

"Perhaps you'll stay the week-end with me?" asked Durant. "I'm not going on to Paris at once, and I'd be very glad. You see, I've been rather alone."

"Like me," said Larson. "Yes, I noticed. Queer we'd run together the last day! Why, about the visit—I don't know, Durant, I don't know. I'd like to mighty well, but I expect I'd make a fool of myself. I'm not acquainted with the way you do things over here."

Durant was puzzled, the more so because he himself was acting in the dark, not knowing what Makoff intended.

"And she was a real baroness, eh?" Larson chewed his cigar. "Well, well! And to think of you—but I suppose you don't imagine that I know who you are? But I do. That's why I'm afraid to accept your invitation. I'd like to, because I like you; anyone can see you're straight as a string, in spite of what they say about nobility. Now, I'm not so sure about that Russian chap—"

"Nobility?" repeated Durant. Larson broke into a laugh.

"Oh, I know about it! That Russian told me. You see, so long as you're Durant to me, it's all right. We get on fine. But when you become Lord Northcote—gosh, man! I'd be proud enough to bust, to think I'd visited you—but think of the breaks I'd make! I wouldn't know whether to call you 'My Lord,' or 'Mister,' or what! And being all alone, with my wife dead, I've no one to steer me around. Not but what it's tempting—"

Durant laughed, largely to conceal his startled amazement, for the old man's loneliness struck him as pathetic. Lord Northcote!

"So I'm a lord, am I?" he said. Larson chuckled.

"Oh, he warned me you'd perhaps be angry—but I'll say nothing about it. You just keep on being Durant, see? If you will, I'll accept the invitation. How about it? I'll have three days in London anyhow. Leaving there Monday."

"Done," said Durant.

HE probed carefully, anxious to make no slip, and came upon the amazing truth. Larson, a Continental by birth, had profound respect for nobility; now, old and wealthy, going back to Europe, the idea of mixing with titled gentry was fascinating in the extreme to him—it was his weak spot.

And lurking in the background behind all this, was black murder.

Warn Larson? Impossible. Against his plans and hopes for rescuing Helen Glincka from the blackmail grip of Makoff, Durant would have let a dozen Larsons go to death. Being a party to it was another matter altogether, and here he could act as events gave him clue. He was well assured that Makoff would have made careful plans by wire, for the Russian had a very able criminal organization to back him up; warning Larson, then, might only precipitate the disaster.

Sooner or later, a break must come with Makoff—indeed, Durant meant to attack the man mercilessly, pitilessly, upon reaching Paris. There he would be on familiar ground, and would have friends among the dope-ring, thanks to Lewis; he could fight fire with fire. Until then, he must inform himself as fully as possible about Makoff's

crowd, arm himself with every possible weapon, prepare!

"I'll have to play my part, save Larson if possible, keep under cover with Makoff," he decided. And aloud: "My car should meet the train—have you any luggage?"

"Just my two suitcases." Larson pointed at the rack. Then he smiled. "I'm keeping close to them, too! One of 'em has a big roll of currency—more than I could carry, for I have my pockets full besides."

"Eh?" Durant stared, wondering at such recklessness. "You're not serious?"

Larson chuckled. "Think it queer, eh? Well, it is! But in the old country, you know,—and all over Europe for that matter,—American money is badly wanted. Not in gold, because it's not pure, but bills. So I'm bringing back a small fortune in hundred-dollar bills. You've no idea what can be bought with hundred-dollar American bills in Europe! I'm going to make my whole family comfortable for life, I can tell you. It may be foolish to carry them, but that's all bosh. I'm careful."

"Yes," thought Durant, "you're blessed careful! You don't even talk about it!"

Something eluded him here—he could sense it. Larson was right enough about the American money being in keen demand; yet there was some subtly felt note in the whole thing that rang queer.

DURANT, cynical enough about most things from his years of bitter struggle with the world, believed in luck. Luck, and no doing of his, had brought him his present affluence. Luck had brought him into contact with Helen Glincka; luck had shown him her story, had given him the chance to serve her. And now, as the boat-train roared on Londonward, luck suddenly bobbed up with the most amazing twist of all.

"Another three-quarters of an hour," said Larson, glancing at his watch. "Hm! Fifteen years since I've been in England, and it looks the same—the same—"

The man's face changed suddenly. His words died. He jerked his hat a little lower, then turned, staring from the window. Durant blinked at him, wondering at his manner, wondering at the odd something about the man. Then he glanced up.

Outside their compartment door was standing a man, looking in. An ordinary Englishman, clipped gray mustache, lounge-suit, square chin, heavy-lidded eyes—only the eyes were not ordinary, for they were the eyes of one who gives orders. A retired army man, perhaps.

He pushed open the door, and came in. His gaze swept Durant, seemed to comprehend him at once, went on to Larson. Durant moved over to make room—the man had come in to smoke, no doubt, as this was a smoker, and the train was fairly full. Next instant, however, Durant realized his mistake. Upon the little compartment settled an atmosphere tense and terrible.

Sitting opposite Larson, the Englishman produced a cigarette and lighted it, indeed—but his eyes were fastened upon Larson, with a grimly humorous expression. Larson gazed at him blankly an instant, then looked away, yet with an effort.

"A bit older, old chap, aren't you?" said the Englishman suddenly. "I fancy we both are, what? Fifteen years—devilish long time, eh?"

Coming so soon after Larson's remark, these words startled Durant, showed him something lay under the surface here. And in the eyes of Larson, he saw it was tragedy.

"I'm afraid you're mistaken," said Larson.

The Englishman laughed, and at the sound of it, Durant stiffened.

"Really, now? Quite a stroke of luck, this—looking for some one else, you know. So your memory has gone off a bit, eh? Most extra'nary, memory! Now, the moment I saw you, I told myself there was my old friend Gunnar Hanson. And what may you be doing in Blighty, Gunnar? Hadn't you fancied it might be a bit unhealthy here, eh?"

"I—I'm going through," said Larson in a strangled voice. "To the Continent. I've made my pile in the States—I'm going through. Not stopping at all."

"Ah, but you're mistaken about that!" said the other pleasantly. "Badly mistaken, old thing! A little matter—what was the name? Inspector Bagwell, wasn't it? I remember his funeral quite well. I promised his widow that I'd bag you some day!"

Smiling cheerfully at his victim, the Englishman put his cigarette between his lips and puffed at it—unfortunately for himself. For Larson, though white as a sheet, lashed out a blow as swift and unexpected as the stroke of a snake.

One short, swift blow—no more. To it, the Englishman crumpled up and sagged limply to one side. Larson's fist showed the gleam of knuckles, as he darted up and to

the door. He drew the blue curtains, then whirled, and stared at Durant with a face of desperation.

Durant was laughing—the mad humor of it struck him in a wave. Here was a murderer, a criminal with a record; and Makoff had picked on him as an innocent victim!

"Well, what about it?" snarled the voice of Larson. The latter was suddenly transformed—the shrewd, gentle, unsophisticated old man had become a crouching, desperate enemy of society. "What you going to do, huh? My only chance was to stop his mouth. You heard him—it was fifteen years ago! They'd nab me for that. You're a lord—you can save me or not. What about it?"



Larson lashed out a blow as swift and unexpected as the stroke of a snake.

Durant's mirth was abruptly banished, and he stared at Larson. The man actually believed Makoff's story, then.

"I'm no policeman," he said. "I suppose you've been a virtuous angel the past fifteen years, eh? Really a manufacturer?"

"Hell, no!" snapped Larson, wide-eyed. "You mean it—you'll give me a chance? I aint lying. I'm a crook—but you invited me. You liked me. Now, will you stick to it or not?"

Shrewd, this! Thinking Durant an Englishman, a mistake no Briton would have made, and really a lord,—a mistake only an American could have made,—Larson was appealing to his pride, his sporting instinct of fair play and word given.

"What the devil are you?" demanded Durant. "A Dane, as you posed?"

"Yes, by birth. I'm a naturalized American now. Yes or no?"

"Yes," said Durant, "—provided you don't murder this chap."

"Done with you," said Larson.

He darted to the prostrate man, frisked him quickly and efficiently, snapped the steel bracelets around their owner's wrists, emptied the pockets into his own, gagged him with handkerchiefs, stretched him out along one seat after throwing up the arms. To Durant it was a revelation—it showed the man as nothing else could have done. Crook, eh? Then Larson was no petty scoundrel. He knew how to do things.

Once more the humor of it smote Durant hard, with added force after Larson's statement. The man was a professional crook, self-admitted, and Makoff had selected him —but wait! Crook or not, he had swallowed the bait and was hooked, thus to an extent justifying Makoff's judgment. And Durant himself had been completely deceived by the rascal.

"Just what sort of crook are you?" asked Durant, extending his cigarette-case. He gave no heed to the senseless detective—Durant had little pity for inefficiency. "Bank-robber, confidence-worker or thug?"

Larson grinned, as he flung his overcoat over the unfortunate Englishman and settled down in comfort.

"To tell you the truth, a little of anything," he said frankly. His shrewd old features settled back into their usual kindly wrinkles. "I've touched all sides of the game—but while I'm with you, I'm straight. That goes! I shouldn't have stopped off in England at all, but I thought it was safe enough—and I was tempted. Now, if you and I go together, say by air, we'll get out of the country. That is, if you'll help me so far! Otherwise, I'm done for. It'll be almost impossible for me to get out of England now, unless—"

He made a gesture toward the shape beside him. Durant shook his head.

"None of that. I'll get you out, all right. So you've made your pile in the States, eh? In what game?"

"All kinds," said Larson, and laughed. Then he sobered. "Look here! We'll have to make a quick get-away when we get to the station—Waterloo, is it? Or Paddington? Porters will come through to get luggage and see if anything's left in the cars."

"Don't worry," said Durant calmly. "My chauffeur should meet us there. And to you, I'll be plain Ralph Durant, understand? What's more, I'll keep your secret. Is it agreed?"

"Agreed," said Larson, and put out his hand. "I'll be on the level with you."

Durant meant his words. He had no intention whatever of telling Makoff anything, and he shook hands gravely with the murderer and criminal opposite. As a matter of fact, he much preferred the man to Makoff.

DURANT had hitherto seen Makoff as a man of culture, energy, ruthless ability; but in the ensuing hours he began to realize why this man could hold his cousin's widow in bonds of blackmail and force her to give not only money, but service, to his cause.

He knew Makoff could have had less than twenty-four hours to prepare for his *coup* against Larson. He knew, too, that Makoff was scrupulously anxious to keep any breath of police suspicion from his activities; much of his work lay among the upper strata of society, and he could not afford publicity or suspicion. Therefore, even granted that he was in touch with some criminal organization in London, his achievement was marvelous.

Having only hand-baggage, Larson and Durant slipped out of the train and down the platform in all haste; they would have only a few moments before the plight of the unfortunate detective was discovered, and swiftness was imperative. Before they had gone the length of the train, however, a neatly liveried chauffeur appeared and saluted Durant as though from old acquaintance.

"All ready, Your Lordship."

"Ah, Giles, how are you?" exclaimed Durant. Inspecting the man, he found him to be no Englishman, certainly—a Continental of some sort. "Here, Larson, turn over your bags to Giles. Is the house opened up for me, Giles?"

"Quite, sir. And the other guests, sir? You cabled one or two others might arrive—"

"Haven't heard yet, Giles," said Durant, and could have laughed to see the expression on Larson's face—half admiring, half delighted. "Lord Tiverton hasn't shown up?"

"No sir, but I have a letter—it came this morning, and as it seemed rather important, I took the liberty to bring it along, sir."

"Give it to me at the car. Hurry, now! Let's get out of this crowd."

Durant let Giles lead the way, and followed with Larson. He did not half like the looks of this tall, rangy chauffeur with a cast in one eye—the man looked altogether too intelligent to be a petty scoundrel. Durant sized him up as a Bulgar or Austrian, from his perfect English and the general cut of his jib.

In another two minutes they were out of the station and climbing into a waiting Daimler saloon that had all the appearance of a luxurious private car. When he had stowed the bags, Giles handed in a letter, closed the door, mounted to his seat, and they moved off. Durant found the letter a registered envelope addressed to Lord Northcote, at an address in King's Road, Richmond.

"Excuse me, will you?" he said, and tore it open in some wonder. He found a page enclosed bearing the following typed message, unaddressed and unsigned:

> Glincka comes tomorrow guest. Also Count Dardent. House small. Others may come. Giles full charge everything.

As Durant pocketed the letter, it occurred to him that Makoff must have

chalked up a pretty telegraph bill from Plymouth.

"Lord, how it's changed in fifteen years!" exclaimed Larson, staring out at the streets. Thin rain was falling. "The busses—would you look at 'em! Block the streets, almost —bigger than the houses! Where are we heading?"

"Richmond," said Durant. "I've a small place there. By the way, I think Baroness Glincka will show up tomorrow, for the week-end, and perhaps Count Dardent. One or two others—hard to say. My return seems to have been advertised. You know Richmond?"

"No, but I used to know a man there." Larson fingered his white mustache, and flung Durant a smile. "Chap named Silver —a Scotchman who managed opera tours and such. I trimmed him at a game once. Well, I expect he's dead long ago! Damnable luck running into that chap on the train—used to be a Scotland Yard man. Wonder what he is now? A baronet, maybe."

"You don't seem worried," said Durant.

The other shrugged.

"Not a bit. I've got two passports—different names, different faces. Inside half an hour every passport bureau in the country will be looking out for my face and Larson's name; I couldn't get out of England on that passport if I wanted to! But on the other, and with you to help, it'll work. Anything will work with one of the nobility in it."

"As court records prove!" And Durant chuckled. "Right-ho! We'll see."

THE big Daimler purred along; Kensington Park fell behind; on to Hammersmith, on out past new built-up additions until the white square tower of Richmond church hove into sight past a long bend of highway. Durant knew barely enough of London to follow the road with understanding, and Larson did not cease to exclaim over the changes of fifteen years.

"Look here!" Larson turned suddenly. "You have a safe in your place, I suppose?"

Durant assented, trusting to luck.

"Well, I'd like you to take charge of my wad while I'm here," went on the other. "I have a bit over sixty thousand, and—"

"Jumping Jerusalem!" ejaculated Durant, in stark amazement. "Sixty thousand dollars?"

"In hundred-dollar bills, mostly—for spending on the Continent," said Larson. "I want to take care of my family there, buy 'em land, spend all I want, and so forth."

"Good Lord, man, you must have cracked a bank!"

Larson chuckled. "No, not exactly. There's been big money in liquor, you know. I made that sixty thousand, and a bit over, in three months, just to show! Well, if you'll stow the coin away, I'll feel better—I know these English servants, and I'd hate to trust 'em. While I can keep it under my eye, all right, but traveling here aint safe."

Durant nodded. This request complicated the situation a bit. Beyond keeping Larson from being murdered, he had previously had little interest in the matter. Finding the man's actual status, he had been cynically delighted at the game in prospect, since Makoff was likely to catch a Tartar. Now it seemed as though Larson would succeed in robbing himself—if Durant let the Russian know about the request.

He decided instantly to do no such thing. The outcome of the whole scheme was immaterial to him, though his sympathy was rather with Larson. Besides—why could not Larson be the man to put a bullet into Makoff? Possibilities here, but he would have to see Helen first. If Makoff were dead, the blackmail might only be transferred.

He threw over the whole problem as the car turned sharply out of the highway, between a pub and a brick wall, heading up the long hill of King's Road, lined on either side with its walled English houses and gardens, dismal from the outside, comfortable and rich within, each one having that sense of privacy and ownership which means so little to the American, so much to his English cousin. Abruptly the car halted before a low house of gray brick, walled about, and Giles held open the door.

"Welcome home, Your Lordship!" he said cheerfully.

The two men left the car, entered the gate, walked up to the house. The door was opened by a maid, who curtsied; Durant saw at a glance that she was French, and nodded to her. Giles brought up their bags.

HOW Makoff had managed this at so short notice was a marvel to Durant. The house seemed unpretentious but comfortable, and was excellently furnished; the living-room windows gave glimpses of a

well-kept garden behind, with walks and fountain.

"You've a room ready for Mr. Larson?" said Durant to the maid. "Good."

She led them upstairs to two adjoining bedrooms; Giles put Larson's grips in one, those of Durant in the other. Then he disappeared. The maid spoke to Durant:

"We've kept luncheon waiting, sir."

"Right," said Durant heartily. "We'll have a wash and be right down. Make yourself at home here, Larson—no ceremony. Come down when you're ready."

"Thanks."

Larson's door closed. Durant turned to the maid, who had waited, and spoke in French:

"Will M. Makoff be here?"

"Tomorrow, m'sieur," she responded. "But he will not be seen."

He nodded, and she departed. So she was in the outfit too!

In fifteen minutes Durant and his guest were sitting in a long, low dining-room that overlooked the garden, while the belated luncheon was served. Larson was full of admiration over the place, as well he might be; his first awe had departed, and he threw off restraint. Under his taciturn exterior he revealed a shrewd personality, as thoroughly American as that of Durant himself. He had spent fifteen years in America, ten years previous to that in England, while his education at home in Denmark had been excellent. To realize that he sat opposite a murderer, criminal, bootlegger, a charming old man who had made an excellent unmoral living off society, was continually astonishing to Durant. And Larson had asked no questions about his host or the reason for an incognito—if he was curious, he bottled it up. So Durant conjured up a history for himself, and it was accepted without a word.

"You know, I liked you at the start!" said Larson, when they lighted cigars and adjourned to the garden for a look around. "You know Makoff well?"

"Not well," said Durant. "I met him aboard the boat. Why?"

"I don't cotton to him," said the other. "He may be a nobleman and all that, and the cousin of Baroness Glincka—that the name?—but I know a crook when I see one. I'd ought to, eh? Yes sir. That bird, for all his society airs, is a bad one."

"I believe you," said Durant with a chuckle. Wary Makoff! The Russian had sensed this suspicion in Larson, and did not intend to show himself as a guest. "Makoff wont show up here, I'm glad to say. How do you know I'm not a crook too?"

Larson glanced at him and grinned. "You've the makings of one, and a good one—but I know a square-shooter when I see him! Let's go attend to that money, shall we?"

Durant nodded, and they went upstairs. He brought one of his own bags into Larson's room—a bag specially made, with Yale lock, though Durant had nothing in it except clothes. Being fully aware, by sharp experience, of the fallacious tourist belief that English-made clothes were better than American, he had loaded up at home with a large outfit.

Larson opened a suitcase and threw out on the bed half a dozen packages wrapped in oiled silk and sealed. He broke one open to reveal crisp new hundred-dollar bills.

"Six of 'em," he said. "Open the others up if you like. Why the suitcase?"

"To hold them until I can get into the safe," said Durant. "Better so."

"Suit yourself."

"What sort of receipt do you want?"

"Receipt, hell!" ejaculated Larson. "Don't be a fool. I don't need any receipt from you."

Durant calmly opened all the packages, found them to be as stated, and then stowed them away in his grip, which he replaced in his room, after locking. He chuckled again to think what Makoff would say to this simple acquisition—after so much pains and expense had been bestowed to get Larson in a murder-trap!

"Decidedly," he said cynically, "it pays to be an honest man!"

HAD Larson been anything but what he was, the composition of Lord Northcote's week-end party must have struck him as very singular, to say the least.

The only woman in the party was Baroness Glincka, who arrived for luncheon on Saturday. Count Dardent proved to be a worn-out, waspish little man with waxed mustaches and dyed hair, who spoke fair English and fluent Danish; he was French, and Durant made a shrewd guess that he had left Paris very much for his health's sake, not to mention his liberty. He noted that Helen Glincka very obviously disliked the little count.

After their day together, Larson and Durant had become almost intimate.

Durant, at least, found his liking for the shrewd old rascal increased by acquaintance. Nothing had appeared in the newspapers in regard to the finding of a trussed-up detective aboard the boat-train, but this meant nothing, except that an extensive secret search was being made for Gunnar Hanson. No further word had come to Durant via Giles or the maid. No other guests arrived, and the four sat down to dinner Saturday night with Durant very much in the dark as to plans. Larson, however, was clearly charmed by thus mixing with Continental and English nobility, and enjoyed himself hugely.



He snapped the steel bracelets around the owner's wrists and gagged him with handkerchiefs.

Dinner was nearly over, when Giles leaned above Durant's chair.

"There's a gentleman asking for you, sir. In the library."

Durant rose, excused himself without the fact appearing strange, and passed into the library. He found Makoff awaiting him.

"Ah!" exclaimed the Russian. "Glad to find everything smooth. No trouble?"

"None, with your perfect arrangements."

"I'll have to turn over the job to you and Michael after all," said Makoff. "I've been called to Paris in haste—making the nine o'clock Southampton train tonight."

"Who's Michael?"

"Giles," and Makoff chuckled. "Good man, eh? Dardent's our regular London agent. Michael has full instructions; I'll give you yours now. Larson, I believe, has fifteen or twenty thousand dollars in currency—"

"Sixty," said Durant. Makoff whistled.

"Sixty thousand? Whew! Still better." He winked delightedly, rubbed his hands. "This house was taken in his name, understand? The cook and so forth engaged in his name. Now—what's the matter?"

"Nothing," said Durant, repressing his consternation at this news. "I was wondering what he'd say if he knew!"

Makoff chuckled. "The cook will be discharged tomorrow night. The maid goes with Dardent—she's his wife, by the way. The Baronne leaves tomorrow night also, via Southampton, for Paris. You and Michael will be here Monday morning. When Larson drinks his early tea, he's done for. Places are already booked for you and Michael on the noon plane from Croydon for Paris. It'll be another day or two at least before Larson's body is discovered, perhaps much longer. You and Michael will bring the stuff. Your seat in the plane is booked in your own name, Michael's in that of Giles Hopper—his passport identity. All clear?"

"Quite," said Durant, "except the neces-

sity for murder. Why not rob him and go? Murder in England means that the law will be at your heels for life."

"Certainly." Makoff eyed him with a grim smile. "But why talk of murder, my dear man? An empty vial of chloral, purchased in a New York drug-store; a dead American, who has rented a house for three months and occupied it for three days; a letter stating that speculations in exchange have wiped out his fortune—who would call it murder? Guests, servants, all dissipated as a dream!"

"It is artistic, certainly." Durant's tone was dry. "I only objected to so much work. Why bother to kill him?"

"Because Americans have loud voices." Makoff chuckled. "And certainly we do not want the law after us! Surely you can realize this?"

Durant nodded and banished his frown. "Right! Indeed, it is magnificent. This Michael is an admirable fellow—I congratulate you on having him. He handles details wonderfully!"

"He should," said Makoff. "He's no other than Michael Korin, who killed Grand Duke Vassily last year in Tours and turned over all his papers to me. Well, I've no time to lose. Give my regards to the charming Baronne—and this envelope. It's her passage to Paris."

Durant took the envelope, shook hands with Makoff and returned to the dinner-table.

Inwardly he was in a ferment of anxiety and excitement; had it been his own neck in peril, he would have lost no whit of his usual icy coolness—but here was another matter. By this time, perhaps, the fact would be known that Larson had rented a house in Richmond—and Scotland Yard would be down on him full force. Had Boris Makoff only known it, he could have robbed Larson with absolute impunity!

Durant looked at Giles, too, with new eyes, appreciating now the frightful danger from this man. He knew of Grand Duke Vassily's murder—all Europe knew of it! The exiled Russian noble had been hideously murdered and robbed—a crime so horribly brutal, so well conceived and executed, that it was supposed to have been perpetrated by Soviet agents. Indeed, the name of Korin had been mentioned as that of the murderer, but the man had never been found.

Things were getting a bit thick, thought Durant to himself. In other words, the simple situation was becoming extremely complex and correspondingly threatening. The only relief in sight was that by Sunday night the group would be scattered, leaving him and Larson alone here with Giles—or Michael Korin. Yet would it be safe for Larson to remain here another twenty-four hours? There was the rub.

The quartet adjourned to the garden for coffee. While Dardent and Larson were deep in floods of Danish, the Baronne was temporarily left to Durant.

"It's confounded hard to get a word with you!" he complained, handing her the envelope. "You're booked for Southampton-Havre tomorrow night."

Her eyes questioned him anxiously. "And you?"

"Paris on Monday. I'll show up, never fear! But Boris has caught a Tartar this time and doesn't know it, so I'm afraid you wont see our honest Giles again."

"Explain!"

"Sha'n't do it. I'm going by results. I intend to show up in Paris and open the fight on Boris—"

"You wont find him!" she breathed. "He disappears. No one knows—"

"Tell that to the marines," said Durant confidently. "Now, you suggest a motor-trip tomorrow—I want to get out of here for the day. Anywhere!"

THE others rejoined them, and the coffee finished, they went into the house and settled down to an evening of bridge. Durant had no more chance that evening for a word with her—he had more than a suspicion, indeed, that Giles was keeping a sharp eye on the Baronne. The motor trip was settled upon for the next morning, with general acclaim.

It was late when the game broke up, and Durant saw his supposed guests to their rooms, then turned in, dismissing his problems. He did not waken until roused at seven-thirty by Giles, who bore his "early tea" after the approved English fashion. Then he sat up in bed.

"Shut the door—that's right! Look here, these Americans aren't used to the English custom of early tea, and I'm afraid your scheme will slip up in the morning. Suppose you fix us up some coffee tonight, after we take Baroness Glincka to her train—eh? That would make the matter more certain."

"Good," approved the other, his high

cheek-bones lending his aquiline face a distinctly Tartar look. "Yes, a good idea. Thank you!"

Twenty minutes later, after a light knock at the adjoining door, Durant stepped into Larson's room. Larson was shaving, and nodded cheerfully to him. Durant lighted a cigarette, drew up a chair, and played the idea that had come to him.

"What do you think of that man of mine —Giles?"

Larson grimaced. "If you ask me, I think he's a crook!"

"He is." Durant laughed. "I overheard an interesting conversation this morning. It seems that tonight, after our party breaks up, a nice little game is to be played on you and me. Giles will fix us up some coffee and sandwiches, and when we go to bed, we'll stay a long time—long enough for the get-away."

Larson, holding his razor in air, turned and stared at him.

"Is that straight? Would they pull that stuff on a lord?"

"You ought to know—you've lived in England."

"Hm! Good gosh, man—do they know about my money?"

"Probably suspect you have some, while they know I have some," said Durant. "What's more, I gather that our friend Giles is wanted by the police in several countries. Rather interesting to think what might have happened, eh? I'll turn him over to the police—"

"Don't do that!" Larson faced him earnestly. "Not until I'm safe, anyhow. Don't you know their ways here? All hands would be gone over with a fine-tooth comb, and that'd mean my finish!"

"Oh!" said Durant. "But what to do, then?"

"Take him with us," said Larson promptly, and his blue eyes sparkled. "We'll take the Baroness to her train, see? But we'll have our own luggage aboard too. Then you spring it on Giles that we're going somewhere for the night—we can go to a hotel—and tell him to meet us tomorrow and go to Paris with us. That'll knock him off his feet, believe me! I thought that fellow had a bad look to his eye, all along."

"All right; we'll drop him in Paris, then. Meantime, about your money: Giles will drive us today, and that's why the place is safe enough until tonight. We'll go over by air, and there's no Customs examination that way; better make the money into a separate packet and take it with you, however, as the luggage is packed in a separate compartment."

Larson nodded, and his wrinkled, shrewd old face cracked in a grin. "Fine, My Lord, fine! We'll have some fun, eh?"

Durant rather thought they would—before it was over.

AT ten that Sunday morning the big Daimler, with the lunch packed and aboard, was standing before the gate of the King's Road house, and Giles had just announced that all was ready, when Larson flung open the door of Durant's room with an excited word.

"Durant! Come here—quick!"

Durant joined him. Standing well back from a window, which overlooked the street, Larson pointed. No words were needed. Coming up the hill, and looking at the house with evident interest, was the man they had left trussed and gagged aboard the boat-train.

"Pinched!" said Larson.

"Not yet." Durant turned. "Shut your door—get packed!"

He darted to the stairs. "Giles! Here—quick, man!"

Michael Korin came up on the jump, and Durant pulled him into his bedroom.

"Look at that man across the street. Know him?"

One look, and the Russian drew back, a gray pallor in his face.

"Sacred name of a dog!" he exclaimed. "Yes! That's Sir John Brentwood himself—of Scotland Yard."

Durant gripped him by the arm, hard.

"All right. Brace up, now! He's looking the place over—we have time to get away. Something's slipped; perhaps they're after you, perhaps after me. We'll get our luggage aboard the car, drop Baronne Glincka downtown, drop Dardent and his wife, get out to Croydon and make the noon plane. Understand? I'll telephone for bookings. Warn Dardent, get rid of the cook instantly, clear the place. Go!"

The man slipped away, obviously badly shaken by what he had seen. Durant turned into Larson's room.

"Get ready! I've got your money in my bag. We're off in five minutes."

"I'll need ten," said Larson, calmly enough. "I must get rid of this mustache, clap on some hair-dye, fix my face."

"Take seven—move like hell!" snapped Durant.

Larson was already plunging for his bag. Catching up his own grips without bothering to pack his scattered belongings, Durant hurried downstairs to the telephone. In two minutes he had the Croydon aërdrome on the line.

"Mr. Durant speaking," he said. "I have bookings for myself and a friend on the noon Paris bus tomorrow. We want to change and go over today. A third may go with us."

"Very sorry, sir, we've just booked the last seat," came the reply. "Hold on just a moment, will you?"

Durant held on, cursing softly to himself. Giles appeared, breathing hard.

"Off in five minutes," he said. Durant nodded. Then came the voice on the wire:

"Hello! I think we can take care of you, sir. We're sending over a D H special to bring back a party of officials, and we can put you and the mail-sacks aboard, if you like. Would there be any trunks?"

"No, nothing but hand-luggage," said Durant in sharp relief.

"Can do, sir. She'll take off a bit ahead of the regular bus, though—about eleven-thirty. Can you get out here by eleven?"

"We've our own car," said Durant. "Yes, we can get out by eleven or shortly after."

"Right-ho!"

Durant hung up and glanced at the man beside him.

"Special plane going over to Paris. We must get to Croydon at eleven. You, I, Larson."

"Good," said the Russian. "I'll arrange to have the Daimler picked up at the aërdrome—it's a rented car. Or Dardent can attend to that detail."

"We'd better all go out at once, carry our luggage, pile in and be off," said Durant. "The house is being watched—you'll have to make a dash for it and throw 'em off."

DARDENT appeared, waspishly excited, and the maid—in reality his wife—followed. Helen Glincka was on the stairs, and Durant took her bags and set them with his own.

"It'll be touch and go," he said, perceiving that the general feeling was that the police were after them all. Naturally, he alone knew the actual facts. "Depends on getting off on the jump. Not a word of anything wrong, now, before Larson! Helen, we'll drop you at the Savoy. Go on to Paris tonight via Havre, as arranged; you're in no danger. Dardent, where'll we drop you?"

"Brompton Road," said the little Frenchman. "Our apartment is there—Michael knows."

"Good. Here's Larson. All together, now—out to the car, pile in anyhow!"

AND how Michael drove, out through Victoria and on to Croydon! Durant marveled at it; no American, accustomed to wide highways and a gradual sweep around other cars, could have tooled a car at any speed along these narrow English lanes, except with long practice. With a head-on collision apparently imminent, each car would give a jerky twist, out and back—and they would be past. There was a peculiar knack to it, and the Russian had this knack at his fingers' ends.

"Why the general rush?" inquired Larson, when the two of them were alone in the car. "Everybody seemed in a devil of a hurry to get gone!"

Durant had already prepared for this, and broke into a laugh.

"We had to get out quickly—so I told 'em the cook had developed smallpox. Cleared out the maid and all, as you saw! Our pleasant chauffeur goes over with us. Here's my bag—I'll get out your money. Wrap it in this newspaper."

They suited action to word, Durant having put his own bags inside the car. With a newspaper-wrapped bundle of sixty thousand dollars in his lap, Larson relaxed and lighted a cigarette. Now, for the first time, Durant had a good view of him, and whistled.

"You certainly have changed yourself! Hope you have your extra passport handy."

"No danger. As to the change—that's a cinch."

It was also a complete success, to which Larson now added a pair of black-rimmed spectacles. With his mustache gone and his hair changed from gray to a glossy black, he looked twenty years younger; eyebrows had become black too, and subtle changes in the outline of his face, due probably to wads of cotton against his teeth, gave him an entirely new look, as did the goggles—stamping him in London as an American tourist.

Now they had turned past the Croydon Arms, and the big car thrummed along wide open until the huge gray hangars loomed ahead. They swung in between the



The two men were reeling, grappling, striking, locked in a mad embrace.

rows of low buildings and came to rest in the parking-space beside the office. Two planes were already warming up—a huge silver giant, triple-engined, and a smaller De Haviland, on the concrete take-off. An orange-brown French machine was just circling to land.

"Mr. Durant?" A crisp, energetic youngster pulled open the car door. "Come along and I'll rush you through—plane's waiting now. We'll have you off the ground before the bus gets here for the regular flight. Into the office, please."

"The car will be sent for," said Durant, and the other nodded.

There was no time lost in weighing in and checking the luggage, which was sent on to the Customs shed and put through perfunctorily, as it would be put through at the other end. In three minutes they were crossing to the passport control office. The Russian went through first; and as they waited, Larson jogged Durant's elbow, indicating a man who sat beside the passport officer.

"Scotland Yard," he said under his breath. "Now watch him!"

He followed the Russian, laid down his passport, waited. Though it must have been a tense moment for him, with his neck in the balance, Larson appeared quite cool. The Scotland Yard man glanced at the passport, glanced up at him, then leaned back and gazed out across the flying field, without interest. Stamped and returned, Larson picked up his passport and went on. Durant followed, and was put through without comment.

The three men stepped through the little door, and found their guide awaiting them. But as they followed out to where the machines were idling, the Russian fell back and joined Durant, in savage bewilderment.

"What's it mean?" he snapped in French. "That one?" And he jerked his thumb toward Larson. Then Durant recollected that he must have seen the other's altered appearance for the first time.

"Getting ready for Paris, I suppose," he said with a laugh.

"Ar-r-rgh!" growled Michael Korin. "Think I'm a fool?"

The man strode on, but in his powerful features was stormy mingling of anger, suspicion, fear. Durant shrugged—what matter, now? He had already determined on his course, rightly estimating the Russian as one of Makoff's chief aides, who must be put out of the way now or later. It might better be now. Only the fact of Larson's predicament, indeed, had prevented Durant from putting the London police on the trail of Michael Korin.

When they reached the De Haviland, the pilot was already in place, testing his engine—a youngish man with twinkling blue

eyes and a stubby yellow mustache. Their guide turned.

"All's loaded," he shouted. "You'll be off at once."

This eight-passenger car was much smaller than the big machines. All but three of the seats were piled high with luggage and freight, for the balance of the loads was most carefully arranged. Durant was given the empty seat forward, Larson the one just behind, and Michael Korin in the rear. Larson shoved his newspaper-wrapped package in the rack, got rid of his muffflings, and gave the staring Russian a sardonic grin.

That grin, Durant reflected afterward, must have done the business—for Korin was no fool.

The roar of the engines rose to a crescendo, and abruptly the De Haviland moved—glided over the ground, bumped, turned, swept madly across the field, bumped again, took the air. A turn, and with the slight bank Larson gripped his chair-arms hard, then laughed as he met the eyes of Durant.

"New experience for me!" he shouted. Michael Korin sat slumped in his chair, frowning savagely, eyes ablaze with sullen fires as he watched the other two men. The altimeter crept around—one—two—three thousand feet. The pilot unreeled his wireless antennæ.

England lay below them.

The De Haviland had the wind with her and was doing her even hundred, so that in less than an hour the yellow sand-beaches of the French coast showed ahead. The glass window of the cockpit showed them the pilot's head, and a notice beside it advised that it be opened for communication if necessary.

Durant took an old envelope from his pocket, and pencil, and began to write. His message was curt and to the point:

Passenger Hopper is Michael Korin, who murdered Grand Duke Vassily last year. Wanted by all police. Radio Paris police at once to arrest him on arrival.

This done, Durant rose and went forward. He reached up and tried to open the little embrasure, but to no effect. The pilot turned, shrugged, and shook his head, shouting something that was lost.

Unable to pass the envelope through, Durant held it up to the glass. The pilot read it, and his eyes widened. Then he nodded comprehension and turned around again; craning up, Durant watched him lean forward, speaking into the microphone set before him. Already the Channel was far behind, the brown-green field-patches of France flitting past underneath. . . . .

To Durant it seemed to happen all in a flash, for he had been intent on what he was doing, and the roaring of the motor drowned out all lesser sounds. There was a rush of movement, the envelope was torn from his hand; losing balance, he staggered for an instant.

Recovering, he saw Michael Korin standing just behind him, glancing at the writing with inflamed eyes—Durant clutched at it, gained it before the Russian had read it—or half of it, at least. In doing so, he lost balance again, to the drop of the plane in an air-pocket, and went sprawling across the freight. As he went down, he saw the figure of Larson, limply sprawled in his seat, head sagging—dead or senseless.

Korin read what was gripped in his hand. It was the top part of the envelope, bearing the first sentence only—but this was quite enough. A scream rang through the cabin, above the thrumming roar of the engine—a scream of wild rage, inarticulate, bestial.

"Traitor!" shouted out the Russian, as Durant got to his feet. "Vile dog of a traitor! What sort of trap have you laid? You want to have me pinched and get away with the money yourself? Or—"

Words, evasion, all useless here! The man was swept by a passion of insane rage; nostrils dilated, lips drawn back in a snarl, eyes aflame, he was out of himself. For an instant Durant, who was unarmed, shrank before the memory of how Grand Duke Vassily had died, his throat torn out by teeth as by the teeth of a wild beast. And here was the wild beast!

Then, braced, Durant leaped and drove in a terrific blow to the stomach. The blow failed. Korin swerved, snapped hand to pocket, jerked out an automatic pistol. Durant's fist smashed on his wrist, and the pistol fell. Then the two men were reeling, grappling, striking, locked in a mad embrace, hurling themselves about the narrow cabin in frenzied desperation of fight, while the earth rolled three thousand feet below.

DURANT speedily knew that, save for luck, he was mastered. No man could cope with the insane fury of this wild beast—for such Korin had become. Though Durant's fist hammered him relentlessly, sending crushing blows to face and stom-

ach, though he himself knew nothing of fighting, Korin seemed made of living steel. Twice Durant got in smashes to the angle of the jaw, with absolutely no effect. Korin flung him about as though he were a child, swept him off his feet with the sheer force of a wild, flailing swing, picked him up and hurled him against the cockpit wall.

Then, leaping on him, Korin got him about the throat in a fearful throttling grapple, and reached for a grip with his teeth. Frantic, Durant broke the hold with the familiar *jiu-jitsu* break of arms inside arms, brought up his knee in a deadly blow; for an instant thought the fight won. Korin staggered, and Durant deliberately smashed him under the chin and knocked him against one window, smashing the glass; then, even before Durant could follow it up, Korin was back on the rebound in another grapple, with a wild and shrill scream.

Durant glimpsed the face of the pilot staring back through the small glass inset, but the pilot was probably unarmed and helpless to intervene. Helpless, too, to keep the De Haviland on an even keel, for with the wild rushes and swift movements of the two men, she was lurching badly. The newspaper bundle was swept from the rack, and packages of bank-notes lay around.

Curtains were torn down, windows smashed; the body of Larson sprawled on the floor and tripped them as they fought. Then, once more, Korin hurled himself in and grappled, bearing Durant backward off balance. The plane lurched wildly. Both men went headlong, locked together— And Durant, underneath, was pitched head-first into the wall. This ended the fight for him.

When he woke up, realizing that he was not dead, Durant found that he lay half doubled into a seat, wrists and ankles lashed with curtain cords. If he had achieved nothing else, his blows had certainly knocked sanity into the Russian, who was terrifically battered. Some little time must have passed, for as Durant looked, he saw Korin smashing the little glass window of the cockpit, striking at it with his pistol.

"Land!" His voice rose shrill above the engine-roar, as he shoved his weapon into the face of the pilot. "Land at once!"

The air-man shouted a response which Durant could not catch. Korin was altogether too sane not to know that his life depended on that of the pilot—he dared not shoot the little Englishman who defied him. He cursed, raved, threatened; then, with a wild laugh, he thrust out the pistol and fired, twice.

As the plane lurched, Durant caught his breath, thinking Korin had shot the pilot. But the crafty Russian had done better—he had smashed the propeller.

The wild roar of the engine was succeeded by a swift and terrible silence, through which drove the voice of Michael Korin in a wild blast. There was something splendid and magnificent about the man in this instant, as he stood watching the pilot and laughed in exultation, awaiting the result of his mad challenge to destiny.

"Now land, you swine-dog! Land, and if you try any tricks, you'll get a bullet!"

"Blast you!" came the pilot's voice, but that was all. The air-man was busy.

KORIN was beyond thought of anything now except the money scattered about his feet, and what would happen somewhere in France, three thousand feet below. He stooped, caught up the packets of notes, stuffed his pockets with them, then straightened again.

Durant realized now that, given any half-decent landing-place, they stood in little actual danger. It all depended on the landing place—but this was a big gamble. Sharply banked, the De Haviland plunged earthward, gathering speed for the final straightening out; struts and braces quivered, thrummed madly; wind whistled and shrieked through the smashed side windows. His eyes going to the altimeter on the cockpit wall, Durant saw the needle shake and turn, twenty-five hundred—two thousand—fifteen hundred—a thousand feet! The whole ship was roaring, shivering, shrieking to the wild plunge earthward.

Something stirred in Durant's brain—wonder at it. Why would Korin do such an insane thing? He must know that he could not escape, that mere landing would not save him, that at each moment the pilot must have been reporting into the microphone what was going on, that on the earth below must be a scurry of cars and motorcycles, police converging on wherever the landing-place would be! Yet there the Russian stood, furiously exultant, carried out of himself by the sheer sweeping excitement of the moment, pouring forth a stream of laughing oaths as he held himself braced and looked out upon the rising earth!

Then the explanation swept upon Durant

in all its simple truth. Korin, as a matter of fact, knew nothing about the microphone! Very few people did know that these planes were so equipped, all of them.

The needle was nearly down, now. Korin was waiting, expectant, hawklike. The ship came to an even keel, floated—the pilot was cursing frantically as he worked. Then silence again, a shout from Korin, a heavy bump—and a crash. No—safe! The ship was bumping, rolling over ground, slowing down.

After this, the end was sharp, swift, dramatic enough even to Durant, who could see nothing of what passed outside the ship. Korin seized a suitcase and beat out the glass of the broken window beside him—needlessly, for he might have drawn the sash—and then crawled out. The voice of the pilot sounded:

"Here, I say! You can't do it, you know—"

Korin laughed, and the sound of a shot brought silence.

A little after, Durant was aware of Larson bending over him, fumbling at his wrists, shaking, excited, yet also laughing.

"Men coming," said Larson. "Two airplanes landing, too—looks like a landing-ground. For the love of heaven, Durant, keep your mouth shut about the money!"

"But he got away with it!" exclaimed Durant. Freed, he sat up, saw the high radio towers and the huts below. "This is Abbeville, just outside town—they can get him. I had the pilot radio his name and—"

"Lay off!" cried Larson frantically. "I got to get to Paris and drop out of sight quick—beat it! Understand? Our pilot aint dead—he only got a bullet through his leg. Let 'em all think the fellow was just trying to make his get-away—"

"And let the money go?" demanded Durant, incredulous.

"Sure, let it go!" said Larson, with a wink. "I got more of it. Let it go!"

Durant shrugged.

NEXT morning, in his little hotel in the Rue Vignon, behind the Madeleine, Durant caught at the *Echo de Paris* brought with his coffee and rolls. On the front page was the story he sought:

> Michael Korin, the assassin of Grand Duke Vassily, was killed yesterday near Abbeville by *gardes champêtres,* in a running battle.
>
> It was no ordinary, sordid slaying; it was drama! This great criminal was crossing audaciously from London to Paris by avion. Recognized by one of the passengers, he brought the avion to earth by shooting away the propeller. The pilot, who was wounded, sent the alarm by radio. Unhappily for himself, Korin touched earth at the Abbeville aërdrome.

Durant, thrilled, laid down his paper. Korin was dead, then! And since the names of all air passengers were carefully registered, and the names of all hotel arrivals in Paris were at once deposited with the police, he would soon be traced here and interviewed.

What of Larson, then? Durant chuckled—for Larson was gone. He had slipped out of the Airways bus as it passed the Gare du Nord, after one hasty grip of farewell, and Durant had last seen him darting into the big station. Larson was gone, somewhere, like a rat hunting its hole. Why? He was safe enough here, surely. And he had still some money left. But what about the money Korin had taken? Surely Larson would claim it.

His eye fell on the paper again, and followed down to the final paragraph of the story. He read it, with stupefied astonishment. The whole thing swept upon him then, with stunning force. Here he had the explanation of Larson's puzzling conduct—and the most astounding joke on Boris Makoff! For Makoff, at this very moment, must be reading this news-story too; he would not understand Larson's share in it, perhaps, but he would quite understand for what he had expended money and brains prodigally, not to mention for what Michael Korin had thrown away his life.

"Bootlegging, indeed!" exclaimed Durant, mirth struggling against wonder and admiration. "The clever scoundrel! I bet a dollar he was never fooled a minute about Lord Northcote—I bet he was on to the whole game, and was playing us all for suckers. And this is why he wouldn't claim the money, and why he's probably outside France by this time, passing off his hundred-dollar bills on Belgians or Danes."

For this final paragraph was curtly pointed:

> In the pockets of the dead assassin were found quantities of American bank-notes, amounting to a very large sum. The fact that they were in Korin's possession drew suspicion, and upon examination they have been pronounced forgeries. Undoubtedly Korin had intended passing them off upon our good merchants of Paris.

Durant thought of what Boris Makoff must be saying—and laughed again.



At Hell-gate Butte

The gifted author of "Captain Jack," "The Cloud King" and "The Field of Amber Gold" here offers another fine tale of wild life.

By BIGELOW NEAL

WINTER in the Bad Lands. The black and gray and crimson of lignite, clay and scoria lay hidden and cold under a blanket of white. Overhead, a star-shot dome of blue, cold as the white mantle below. Northward, stretching from horizon to horizon, a gold and purple banner trembled in the sky. Slender lancelike beams of light darted toward the zenith. Like tongues of flame they flickered across the sky, to pause, to tremble, and to fade again. Under the wavering brilliance of the northern lights, grotesque shadows leaped and played among the turreted peaks.

And then, another shadow: a great shaggy thing of gray, moving steadily along the cañon floor—sometimes in a long, bounding lope, sometimes at a slow, stealthy trot; but always the other wild things shrank from its path, trembling. For this was the king of all the wolves—not the well-known "lobo," but that uncatalogued monster of the prairies known to the old-time cattlemen as the buffalo wolf, the gray death of the Bad Lands.

A weasel tearing dry, fibrous shreds from the bones of a long-dead deer heard the almost soundless footfalls of padded feet. Breaking off in the middle of his meal, he looked and saw—and was gone. A black-tailed buck, trotting serenely about the night's business, met the gray one face to face. With a snort of fear he bounded high onto the slopes of a clay butte and disappeared over its crest in a haze of flying snow. From the depths of a washout came a coyote, a male and hitherto the lord of the Bad Lands. Like the others he paused in wonder, looked with fear, and then plunged away into the night.

At the foot of Hell-gate Butte the gray shadow paused. Subterranean noises issued from that strange eminence, and weird lights flickered. Odors too, pungent and breath-taking, drifted on the night air. But the gray one was a female and heavy with young, and though a stranger in the strangest land of all, time pressed. Skirting a sinkhole of bubbling mud, she followed the steep course of a washout toward the summit. At last she came to a yawning cave,

and entered—and once more the night was given over to the northern lights and the long-drawn howl of a coyote from somewhere among the hills.

OF all the strange formations of that geological nightmare known as the Bad Lands, this Hell-gate Butte is one of the most fantastic. Many years ago, presumably, a tiny spring bubbled from a vein of lignite coal at the foot of the butte. Slight as it was, the flow of water was sufficient to moisten a small area on the cañon floor. Grass sprang up and became a patch of vivid green against the dead blue-white of alkali and clay. One day a tiny piece of fluffy cotton floated up from the bottom lands along the Missouri River. Drifting here and there on the freakish air currents, it settled, at last, on the moist earth by the spring. Within the fluff of cotton lay a seed. The seed germinated and became a tree. The tree grew steadily through the long, slow years, and in the end, a giant cottonwood flung widespread branches across the face of the butte. Then, something happened. The spring ceased to flow and the great tree died; worms tunneled under the bark until it fell or hung in shreds; woodpeckers drilled holes in the bleaching skeleton, and it became a haven of refuge for hornets and weasels, a roosting-place for the crow and eagle.

One summer, following a long dry spell, a storm came out of the West. It was a rainless storm—"a dry storm," as they say on the prairie. But what it lacked in moisture, it made up for in wind and lightning. Came a blinding flash of light, and the echoes of a thousand cannon reverberated among the Bad Lands. The great cottonwood lay in a smoldering heap of splintered wood across the vein of lignite.

The fire which the burning cottonwood kindled never went out. Slowly but surely, like a malignant growth, it spread to the lignite, and thence onward into the heart of the hill. As the coal burned out, the ground above became pockmarked with caves and pits. In some the air was dry and clean and cool; in others, it was mixed with steam and gas from the burning vein.

Year after year, the butte smoldered. Columns of smoke and gas streamed up along its weathered slopes and united to form an ever-shifting halo above its summit. At night the ghostly light of subterranean fires played among the hills.

The name "Hell-gate Butte" was a translation from the language of the red man. One night, so the story runs, an Indian was passing alone through the Bad Lands. He was fearful, for the sound of the winds drawing through those halls of antiquity spoke eloquently of the moaning souls in the white man's place of eternal punishment. Rounding a bend of the cañon, he found himself facing the foot of the great butte, and suddenly he stopped frozen in his tracks, for there before his eyes were the portals of hell itself. To his nostrils came the pungent fumes of sulphur; he saw the sullen glow of fires; and among them weird fantastic shadows danced and writhed. From somewhere in the bowels of the earth came a low hiss, a deep, rumbling growl and a moan of awful agony. He turned and plunged into the night. As the cowboys say, "He ran like the milltails of hell."

MONTHS passed after the coming of the buffalo wolf to Hell-gate Butte, and the grip of winter was broken. Chinook and sun cut through snow and ice, and covered the buttes with a lacework of tiny streams hurrying down to the Missouri. Even the drifts on the northern slopes, holding out until the last, like delicately penciled eyebrows among the peaks, gave way to the warmth of spring; and with their disappearance came days when the lower, grass-clad shoulders and ridges were gorgeous with the lilac and blue of the pasque flower. And now the wild plum thickets, the thorn-apple and the choke-cherry bloomed as though at a preconcerted signal, and the air hung heavy with the perfume of their artificial snowbanks. Infrequent areas of sod became rippling banks of green, framed in the blue and white of clay and alkali.

One night the moon swung clear of the eastern horizon and the Bad Lands became a playground of light and shadow. Warm air drawing up from the lowlands along the Missouri brought shimmering protests from the boughs of cottonwood and ash. The atmosphere was charged with the spirit of adventure, with the promise of new life, with the hope that rides on the bosom of Spring.

Out on the moonlit alkali the weasel was again at work on the bones of the deer. As he tugged at the shriveled hide, he constantly shifted his position, that his beady little eyes might keep unbroken surveillance

over the other people of the night. A jack-rabbit, hopping along the cañon floor, stopped at intervals to thrust his nose and tongue into the alkali in search of salt. Seeing the weasel, he jumped to the top of a petrified stump, where he sat up straight and watchful, his ears pointed to the sky. Next came an animal in black and white, a small fellow carrying a plumed tail over his back. The weasel gave vent to a harsh, squeaking cry and fell back before the advance of his deadly relative; but the skunk, on business bent, ignored the little brown fighter and passed in somber dignity to the beginnings of a hole at the base of a butte. The skunk feared none, for he carried the weapon of his kind before which even the mountain lion recoiled in horror.

Then along the floor of the cañon and from the direction of Hell-gate Butte, came the hero of this story, although at that time there was little about him to imply the part he was to play. In general he was fashioned like a puppy, more slender, perhaps, and differing too in the small pointed ears as well as in the tail, which instead of curling above his back after the manner of puppies' tails, hung straight down until its point scarcely cleared the ground. Under the moon, his color-scheme appeared a dingy brown, but in daylight he would prove to be fawn-colored, excepting the nose which was darker and shaded to black around the nostrils.

Evidently the puppy had inherited an exaggerated sense of caution without having had actual experience enough to be afraid. The shadow of a sage-bush caused the hair on his back and neck to bristle and stand erect, while his lips drew back to disclose glistening white rows of needle-like teeth. A moment later he was making friendly advances to the sinister gray form of a badger, crossing the cañon before him. Again it was obviously his first adventure away from the protection of his mother, for at times, when shadows threatened the unknown, he paused and turned in the direction of Hell-gate Butte while a whine of doubt and perplexity formed in his tiny throat.

By the carcass of the deer he came to a halt, for the little brown animal with the black-tipped tail and beady eyes was of a kind he had never seen before, and he detected a musky odor, something he was later to learn as inseparable from the presence of the skunk, mink and weasel. The scent stung the puppy's nose, and he wrinkled his nostrils in disgust. Then he sat down, head cocked to one side, eyes fixed in mild curiosity on the activities of the weasel.

SOME minutes passed, and save for the rasping of the weasel's teeth on bone and sinew, and the soft scratching of the skunk at the base of the butte, no sound broke the stillness of the night. The jack-rabbit dropped his forepaws to the ground and crouched, his black-tipped ears flattened against his neck. The puppy, lulled to drowsiness by the moonlight and warm air, dropped to his belly and lay with nose extended along his forepaws, watching the weasel. One eyelid closed; he opened it again. The other one drooped; he opened that one too—but then both closed, and he was asleep.

From somewhere came a note of danger. A pebble, dislodged from above, rolled down to the valley floor. The rabbit sprang away to the hills, and the weasel was but a streak of brown as he darted for the protection of buckbrush and sage. There remained in sight only the skunk, still working undisturbed on his abode at the foot of the butte, and the puppy, lying asleep in the moonlight.

Down the face of the butte, crouching low and moving silently a few inches at a time, crept a deadly thing the color of molten silver. At the foot of the butte but a few feet from the puppy, it paused and made ready to spring. A convulsive tremor ran along its body. Under the silvery skin, powerful muscles rippled as they glided into position.

The puppy was dreaming—dreaming of the time when his mother had first taken him out to hunt for mice in the valley by the big butte. He was in pursuit of a mouse, and his legs began to jerk spasmodically. He was gaining, and the tail of the mouse was almost within reach of his nose. Another second, and he would have his supper. With a mighty effort he stretched his neck to grasp his prey—but the mouse went down a hole. He jammed his nose in after it. He couldn't stop, and his nose wouldn't come out. With a gasp at the memory of pain, he awoke and sprang to his feet—to find himself staring into a face of horror.

He saw high pointed and tasseled ears, a hideously bearded under jaw, a cruel mouth with rows of saberlike teeth. He tried to run, but was rooted to the ground

by the awful fascination of the flickering glare in the big yellow eyes. For the first time he had met a lynx, and for the first time he knew the terror of death.

Disconcerted by the puppy's sudden emergence from sleep, the big cat had hesitated, but now he crouched again. In a moment all would be over. One blow from the lancelike claws and the puppy would lie senseless and bleeding at his feet. But a new actor appeared on the scene, a shaggy, bounding gray shape that advanced swiftly toward the lynx. It was the terror of the night, the beast before which the other wild folk fled in awe.

The big cat stood not on the order of his going. Before a mountain lion he might have shown fight, but before this great beast he turned and fled toward his den in the sandstone ledges above. Behind he heard a sound, half-growl, half-snarl, that rose and broke on the night air in a long moan.

Instead of retreating before this newcomer, the puppy advanced with whimperings and whinings of welcome, and standing on his hind feet, he tried to lick her nose. To the other animals of the Bad Lands, she might be the incarnation of death itself, but to him she was the source of food and life, of safety and warmth.

For a while the two stood there in the moonlight. The mother found a sandburr tangled in the hair on the youngster's neck. She pulled it out and began licking his face and ears.

In return he made playful passes at her legs and tail. After a time they fell to a semblance of fighting, and the noise they made spoke eloquently of anger and blood. Puppy growls and deeper growls that awoke the echoes in the hills, snarls that were but ludicrous parodies, and snarls that carried fear to the hearts of other wild creatures a mile away. They rolled over and over, sometimes the mother on top and sometimes the son; when his turn came, he buried his tiny teeth in her throat and growled and shook until he shook himself bottomside up. That was play, all the play they knew.

AT last the mother set off in the direction of Hell-gate Butte, and the puppy followed, but slowly, for the night was still young, and he hated to go back to the gaping hole in the clay. He had tasted freedom and was minded to prolong the enjoyment. That was how it happened that he fell behind, and was still near the foot of the butte when his mother disappeared in the hole above. Finding himself alone again, he sat down to look and listen, but his musings were cut short by a deep rumble within the butte. He felt the earth quiver, and the rumble became a roar. Rocks broke loose from the ledges above and thundered down the slopes. The surface of the butte began to slide, then stopped and settled back into immobility. Gas broke from a vent with a loud hiss, and a blinding, choking cloud of dust enveloped him. With a wild shriek of terror, he turned and ran, even as the Indian had run, long years before.

Miles away, on the crest of another peak, the puppy stopped from exhaustion. Back of him the air was still filled with dust, and he could see the dull glow of newly exposed fires reflected on the clouds. There came to him a feeling of utter loneliness. Somehow he sensed that he had seen his mother for the last time; that the heart of the fiery butte held all that he loved, and thenceforth he must face his life alone. The mournful notes of a turtledove came from a tree below him, and it too was unutterably sad. Far away he heard the staccato cackling of coyotes, and the anguished notes of their chorus. In fear of the night and the shadows and the eerie noises about him, he crouched trembling against the earth.

All through the hours of darkness and the day that followed, and again through another night, the puppy made no move. Under a projecting ledge of sandstone, partly hidden by sage and buckbrush, the little fellow huddled in a newfound terror. The world, as he knew it, had become a place of horrors. During the day he feared the sunlight, and at night the unknown shadows. Every sound increased his fears a thousandfold. Then as the long hours passed, he realized a new misery, a strange gnawing pain—something he did not understand, for he had never been hungry. The heat, too, increased his discomfort, and a burning thirst filled his throat. His tongue swelled until it was too large for his mouth, and when the hot sun of the second day touched the already sweltering sandstone above him, he grew desperate. Hunger and thirst drowned even the fear of death. He got to his feet and staggered forth into the light of day.

Slowly, very cautiously, he picked his way down the face of the hill. Mostly

he kept to the washouts, and left them only for the protection of buckbrush or, sometimes, for the tall, rank grass which grew in the low places. In this way he came at last to a spot where dark-colored water, seeping from the clay, gathered like miniature cups of coffee in the tracks of deer and cattle. It was warm and brackish, but never again would he taste of anything so good. A little later, under a clump of joint-grass, he found a shallow pool scarcely longer than his body. Here, trying for another drink, his feet slipped and he fell into the water. The touch of the muddy liquid was cool and soothing. He tried going a little deeper, and finally lay down with the water halfway up his sides.

With the quenching of thirst, and under the cooling influence of the water, the swelling left his tongue, but his hunger increased. In time he grew restless and started out again in search of food. In following a rabbit-trail through the underbrush, he crossed the air-lines of a scent which spoke eloquently of something to eat. He trailed it up, inch by inch, and discovered a great bird on a nest. Driven beyond the realms of caution by hunger, he rushed in and sank his teeth into the feathery breast. Then things began to happen—there was a fleeting vision of a yawning mouth—a cruel curved beak—and a wing that shot out above him like a burnished cloud. A sudden stabbing pain in the back of his neck, another in the loose skin of his flank, and he felt himself lifted clear of the ground and heard the whistle of wind through vibrating feathers. He saw the earth falling away below. Soon on a level with the highest peaks, he saw them also dropping away until they became scoria-pointed needles protruding from the floor of the abyss.

The pain in the puppy's neck was unendurable, and he twisted his head, to snap again and again at the great golden-brown body above. At last he felt something tangible between his jaws. There came the snap of breaking bone. The muscles of the bird's talons relaxed, leaving the puppy swinging from one leg, like the pendulum of a clock. Again and again, as he stabbed at the form above, his tiny teeth were lost in the mass of feathers on the breast. But at last he found a soft place behind the ribs, and he struck again. The eagle screamed. Then they were going down, sailing in great spirals; the noise of whistling feathers increased to a roar; and the peaks below were reaching up to meet them like a flock of red-tipped arrows. Once more the puppy struck with all his strength, and the steady roar of the wind changed to a flapping, fluttering sound, while a dancing stream of feathers sucked after them from above. Peak after peak shot by, and up. There came a crash; the splintering of branches, then silence and darkness.

WHEN the puppy opened his eyes, it was already twilight, and he lay for a while blinking as though newly aroused from a deep sleep. A slight movement brought a twinge of pain in his flank, and he turned to lick the wound. The taste of blood, even his own, drove him frantic with hunger, and it was then he saw the form of the dead eagle dangling from a low branch over his head. He pulled it down and ate—ate until his sides stood out like the ends of a peanut. At last, when he could eat no more and the bird was still too heavy to carry away, he set about digging a hole to bury what remained. With the excavation only half deep enough for its purpose, he rolled in the big bird and scratched the dirt around it. The result was obviously a failure, and he spent another long period carrying sticks and leaves to cover the protruding feathers.

That night he slept, curled up in a brown ball by the side of the dead eagle. In the morning, too thirsty to think of food, he went back to the waterhole. Returning later for his breakfast, he found the bird gone. Nothing remained but a new scent which puzzled him, for it was not altogether different from that of his mother. He followed it a little way through the underbrush, but being yet too full to hold an interest in any one thing for long, he curled up and went to sleep again.

FOR a month or more the puppy lived the life of a wanderer. He found the nest of the eagle he had killed, and ate the eggs. That taught him to hunt for hawk-nests; they were plentiful and often accessible to him in this treeless region. He had learned caution, however, and never molested the bird, but waited, biding his time, until the hawk had climbed into the air for its daily exercise. In June he began to find young cottontails and jackrabbits.

Although of food and drink there was then no lack, still something was wrong.

Nowhere could he find a friend. Enemies everywhere, but no one to whom he could show affection. Lonely and desolate, he climbed one of the peaks and held a long, moaning communion with stars and moon.

That summer the Bad Lands sweltered under a coppery sun. Waterholes shrank until their bottoms were but barren areas of sunburned mud; buffalo grass, which had begun so bravely in the spring, turned brown and brittle, and scattered like chaff under the footfalls of animals. During the days of intense heat the puppy lay quiet in the depths of plum or choke-cherry thickets. If it was too hot to go abroad in the daytime, he must perforce find his food at night, and so under the force of necessity he reverted to the habits of his kind and became a creature of the shadows.

One night he followed the tortuous course of a cañon, one of the kind beginning nowhere and ending in oblivion, and came to an open space between the hills, to a garden of geologic monuments. Giant mushrooms of rock-capped clay stood shoulder to shoulder, a veritable graveyard of antiquity. A breeze sucking through the cañon drew varying notes of protest from the grotesque forms of weathered clay, and the ensemble produced a wide range of tones, changing from moans and groans to prolonged, high-pitched shrieks, as the force of the winds dictated.

THE eerie shapes and sounds strung the puppy's nerves to a high state of watchfulness, and when he heard the metallic scratching of sharp claws on a balancing rock above his head, he was ready and sprang quickly to one side. A long, yellowish, cat-like shape sailed through the air and struck on the ground behind him. It was his first meeting with a mountain lion. Here was a time when discretion became, by far, the better part of valor. With all the speed in his slender legs he leaped forward into the darkness. Had he known that a mountain lion depends almost wholly upon surprise and seldom pursues its prey, the occasion would have called for less effort, but of this he was ignorant, and his imagination told him of pursuing footfalls and a villainous mouth opened wide and pressing hard on the end of his tail.

In this moment of extreme fear the puppy reverted to instinct, and all unknowingly turned in the direction of the spot which had once been his haven of refuge. When he stopped at last, and dropped on his belly, to lie panting from exhaustion after his long run, he was high on the brow of Hell-gate Butte. He had returned to the home of his mother.

WITH the approach of daylight the puppy shifted his position, and in doing so ran across something which seemed to merit investigation: an abandoned badger-hole under a ledge at the highest point of the butte. For a time he stood and studied the entrance. A spider web woven across its mouth gave it an air of desertion, and the puppy decided to explore. Cautiously, stopping at intervals to sniff and to listen, he worked his way down to a point where the tunnel opened to a fair-sized chamber. Certainly the gods were kind. He had found a home where he could lie secure and cool during the hot days of summer.

But it seemed there must always be a fly in the ointment, for ahead in the darkness he heard a sound, soft and low like the rustling of velvet, and ending in a sharp, explosive hiss. Without stopping to change the relative position of head and tail, the puppy retired with a fair show of speed and took up his original stand outside the entrance.

Sometime later the puppy had fallen asleep. A flood of warm sunshine played down into the tunnel. There was no sound but the fitful buzzing of a hornet entangled in the tattered spider web. And then up the slope came the occupant of the badger-hole, a big snake over seven feet long, with a body larger than a strong man's arm. He moved with a slow effortless motion and stretched himself beside the sleeping puppy prepared to enjoy his share of the sunshine. His tail took up a dreamy, side-to-side movement that ended by tickling the puppy's nose.

Opening his eyes, the puppy rubbed a paw over his nose and immediately drove his teeth through the offending tail. In the smallest fraction of a second the scene of peace and harmony became a battlefield. The tail jerked away and became a part of hissing yellow coils surmounted by a waving, darting head and beady eyes that glittered cold and deadly in the sunlight. But when the dust had settled, the soul of the bull-snake had gone to the place from which a snake never should have come in the first place, and the puppy remained in possession of the field and a new home.

MONTHS passed, and the puppy of the buffalo wolf had nearly reached maturity. The fawn color had long since disappeared, and in its place had come a gray, although his tail was darker and there were yellow and bronze hairs along his sides and back.

One night when he was a little more than a year old, he had joined a circle of coyotes on a snowdrift. It was the mating season, and a new sense of loneliness had grown in his breast. He came in peace, seeking naught but friendship, but the coyotes were not of his people and did not understand. One, a male and the largest in the circle, snarled a warning, but the warning went unheeded. The youngster was not thinking of war, so he sat down and let his tongue hang out, a sure sign of peaceful intent among dogs, either wild or tame. The coyote thought the youngster was afraid, so he sprang forward and drove his teeth through the skin of the puppy's throat. . . . . A few minutes later the puppy was alone again, for the ring of coyotes had melted into the night while their vanquished champion had slunk away, dripping blood from a score of wounds. It was a victory for the puppy, but an empty one at that, for from that time on, even the coyotes feared him, and they were his nearest of kin.

ALMOST two years had gone by since that night when the landslide had blotted out the den on Hell-gate Butte. The days and nights when the lonely puppy had wandered through the Bad Lands in search of food had gone forever, for the puppy had ceased to be. He had grown a massive frame, and with growth had come strength. The additional speed of his limbs and the crushing power of his jaws had been translated into terms of more food, and food in turn had hastened the process of growing.

In time he became a terror to the other wild things of the Bad Lands. One by one, he met the enemies of his puppyhood; and one by one, they went down before him. The lynx, whose attack had so nearly nipped his puppy life in the bud, was only a thing of memory, for he had left her kicking her life out on the alkali. There was left only the big yellow cat from the mountains—the lion that had chased him back to the fiery home of his mother.

The time came when nearly all the game had been frightened away, and he had found it necessary to go farther afield for food, and so had found a new enemy—man. Where the coyotes killed sheep and calves and turkeys, he killed colts and sometimes half-grown cattle. In time he became a scourge, and a reward was placed upon his head. Summer and winter he was hunted. He stepped in a trap and escaped only by chewing the toes from one foot after it was frozen. Once a bullet broke his lower jaw, and he was forced to suck eggs from prairie chickens' nests until the bones had knitted; but always his marvelous recuperative powers carried him back to health. Then, in the end, made desperate by hunger, he attacked and killed a young stallion, the property of the Government and the Indians on the Cottonwood Reservation. The Indian agent organized both red men and white against him, and redskin trailers tracked him to his home on the hill of the many fires. At last they were ready to strike.

The Indian agent watched the signs of the weather, and then came a clear day, neither too warm nor too cold, when the moon was full and a light fall of snow made it easy for the red trailers, should their aid become necessary. By sundown the open space before the agency office was a seething mass of excited red men. Scattered among the boys and youths of the new generation was an occasional tuft of eagle feathers, marking the presence of a warrior of the old régime. Modern rifles and automatic shotguns were side by side with the muzzle-loaders of an older time, and once the rays of the setting sun struck fire from the polished blade of a lance, a relic of the days when Ree met Sioux by the bloody shores of the Greasy Grass. Outside the reservation fence and beyond the hill of fire other groups were forming. White men, those, waiting the signal to draw their lines through the Bad Lands and connect at either end with the lines of their painted allies.

Just before the closing down of night, a long column of horsemen moved out from the agency to break up into groups and glide in ghostly silence to their allotted stations in the Bad Lands. The cold twilight of night had faded from crimson to gray and from gray to blue. A curtain hung along the western horizon. For a time the Bad Lands were illumined only by the reflection of starlight on vast areas of wind-carved snow, but soon a dull glow formed in the east. Pillars of mounting

light, radiating from a common center, spread fanwise above the skyline, and the blood-red rim of the moon appeared.

The peaks and fantastic forms of clay glittered like mountains of jewels. Moonlight played on the snow and among the frost-crystals which shimmered and sparkled in iridescent splendor, while scoria slides splashed the hillsides with blood. In the artificially heated air that hung above the crest of the burning butte fleecy streamers of water vapor floated back and forth, to chill and fall in showers of glittering frost, as they wandered into currents of colder air from the ice-filled valleys below.

The mouth of the old badger-hole, larger by twice its original diameter, and half obscured by clouds of steam, looked as abandoned and lonely as in the days of the spider web. The vapor thickened, and the mouth of the hole disappeared in a shifting gray cloud. Then a current of air rent the curtain of steam and the silhouette of a great, shaggy gray beast stood out against the star-studded sky. On the crest of the fiery butte stood the king of wolves.

AS the curtain of steam lifted to show the great animal at the mouth of his den, a cottontail, far down the slope, darted toward his thorn-protected runway with a squeak of terror. A prairie chicken rose with a flutter of protest and darted away through the air-lanes of the night. From a clump of thorn-apples a black-tailed doe sprang into the open, to stand poised a moment in the moonlight. An instant later she was in full flight, while behind her, running nearly as fast and with far more endurance, came the great wolf. At the end of a mile the wolf had lost ground, and the deer was still bounding high, wasting her strength in useless effort; another mile, and the wolf was holding his own; a third, and he was gaining. The doe was running now, head low, ears back, giving the best she had; but the best was not enough. It was late in the season, almost time for spring and the birth of her young. From behind her came a noise, not the shrill yelp of the excited coyote, but the low, pitiless, moaning bay of a wolf. Putting forth all her strength, she darted over a divide and down into the valley of petrified trees and giant mushrooms.

Suddenly, from the top of a balancing rock, a long yellow streak leaped into the moonlight. This time the aim of the lion was good, and there came the dull impact of flesh on flesh. For an instant the deer and lion became a rolling, tangled ball of yellow and tan. Then the lion came uppermost and drove her curved teeth at the throat of the doe, but they never reached their objective, for a great gray thing of wrath and silent fury sprang across the prostrate bodies; and as he passed, the wolf drove his fangs in the side of the big cat's neck.

Again and again he crossed and recrossed the tumbling pair, each time striking with the precision and speed of lightning. Smarting with pain, the lion loosened her grip on the doe and turned to face her assailant, but this time she had to deal with something more than a timid puppy. In the deadly glitter of his eyes she beheld a hatred equal to her own. In the fangs, gleaming white in the moonlight, in the high arch of the plumed neck where the yellow mane bristled defiance, she read the battle-signs of the wild. For a moment she paused, spitting and snarling and scratching at the ground, while her long tail lashed the snow to silvery fog on either side. Then her confidence returned. Never within her memory had a living thing defied the awful, raking power of her claws. Gathering her spring-steel muscles, she launched herself at the shaggy form before her.

A miscalculation of the smallest fraction of a second on the part of the wolf would have resulted in his being literally flayed alive, but he made no such error. Without waiting for her to strike, he lunged forward and under. When the big cat struck the ground, he was beyond reach, while blood spurting from a wound in the lion's side crimsoned the snow beneath her. Once more, and still again, she tried, but the great wolf was her equal and more. When she struck the ground for the third time, and before she could recover her balance, he rushed in and buried his teeth in her back. With a wild scream of agony she tore loose and fled, while the wolf, forgetting, in his hour of triumph, the doe that had scurried from sight among the hills, stood in a snow-sodden pool of blood and sent his song of victory ringing among the crags and peaks above.

Miles away, where the Bad Lands gave way to prairie, a yelping coyote heard the blood-curdling cry of the wolf, and breaking off in the midst of his song, he

slunk away into the night. A night-prowling porcupine stopped, listened and curled himself into a needle-covered ball. Then as the great beast's cry of defiance died away, a hush settled over the earth, the hush of mortal fear; the wild folk knew that the greatest killer of all was abroad, and death hovered about them. Suddenly, from around a point in the direction taken by the lion, came a new sound, the clear, shattering report of a rifle. In an instant another, and then a spattering volley. Once more the hairs on the great wolf's neck bristled, and when his ears caught a far-away scream of mortal agony from the lion, he too turned and bounded away. Afraid of nothing else that walked or crawled among the Bad Lands, he knew the terrible menace of man and his rifle, and he ran as he had never run since the night the lion had chased him back among the fires of Hell-gate Butte.

Mile after mile among the peaks and buttes he still sped on. At a long, bounding lope and driven by muscles which acknowledged no superior, he passed through the scenes of his puppyhood, along the base of the burning butte and so out toward the prairie beyond. And then it came again—the crackling of rifles, the whine of bullets, the high, excited yells of men. Wheeling back on his tracks, he tried a new direction—but there once more was the line of men. He was running in a great circle. Somewhere there must be a break in this cordon of death, somewhere a place where he could slip through to freedom! Hour after hour he plunged on, desperately searching a chance to escape. The night wore on, and paled into the blush of dawn. He was breathing heavily, running with his head hung low, and his swelling tongue impeded his breathing. Daylight came, and the forenoon passed. Always his circle grew smaller and smaller. To the north and the south, to the east and the west, it was the same—an endless line of men and rifles. At last, when the valleys were filled with a yelling mob of red men and white, he was forced to the slopes of Hell-gate Butte.

HE was a fair target against the butte above, and a haze began to form before and behind—the dust from flying steel and lead. A continuous rattle of rifles below; the monotonous moaning whine of ricocheting bullets above. Up and up he climbed, until he gained the highest pinnacle of the butte and crouched against the ground to escape the flying particles of steel and gravel.

Here then, was the end; here on the top of the burning peak which had always been his home, the last of the buffalo wolves was to be riddled with shot and left to rot on the slopes of the butte. His crime—the felony of being, of living according to the instincts of his kind! He heard them coming, heard them climbing the sides of the butte; but even so it was not ordained that mere man should boast of killing the gray death.

Down in the heart of the butte a reservoir of water had been forming through the years. Without warning, it broke through and emptied its contents into the fiery pit beneath. The heart of Hell-gate Butte became a vast boiler; the pressure rose until the weight of the peak became as nothing; the earth trembled; fissures opened, and steam shot forth in wild hissing columns; the rock-crowned battlements which had stood the wear and tear of centuries toppled and fell; dense clouds of dust and smoke and gas poured into the air and hung like a trembling pall about the crest and base of the doomed peak. The rumbling noise of falling rock and rolling boulders swelled into a mighty chord, in unison with the high-pitched yells of fleeing men. And then silence—a silence more terrifying than the tumult of sound which preceded it. A breath of wind out of the west, and the curtain of dust rolled back. Instead of the towering peak, men saw only a pile of tumbled rocks and clay. The fire which had eaten the heart from the great butte had been smothered to ashes, and Hell-gate Butte was but a name.

The cattle-men tell the story of how the last of the buffalo wolves lies buried beneath the ruins of Hell-gate Butte. There's another story, told around the council fires of the Hidatsa, of how a shaggy monster rode the crest of an avalanche of rock and clay, a fearful, gray shadow whose eyes shot fire as it darted through the lines of red men.

There's still another story. This comes from a land far to the west, where rocks are piled against the sky like the teeth of a crosscut saw. It tells of a female buffalo wolf, the last of her breed in the Rocky Mountains, and how for years she wandered in and out among the crags, calling for a mate. One night an answer came—and she was no longer alone.



Mr. X

By

C. FRANCIS BURTON

Illustrated by E. R. Kirkbride

The impressive story of a man with a blot upon his past, who had built up a new life and a new name in a far Western community when—the Past overtook him.

PINE VALLEY, reaching up into the snow-rimmed mountains for thirty miles above a bottle-necked cañon, was one of the last corners of the West to be reclaimed by the home-seeker. Even the watery-eyed trapper found it a little remote and inaccessible. But Joe Sommers, looking down into the valley from the western rim over those towering green pines, found in the primitive waste, with its fertile trackless benches, a haven of rest, a refuge of safety. It held a promise: "They will never find you here." He carried a rifle in the hollow of his bent arm and a heavy pack on his tired shoulders.

Since escaping prison, where he had been sentenced for life for the murder of John Baird,—a man he had never seen,—he had lived in fear, going from place to place. His savings of five years had been thought to be the money of the murdered man, and circumstances were against him. He was left penniless. He sought no revenge against the law or society for the wrong, but he did want his liberty. How he hated that prison, the stench, the lock-step, everything! Here liberty beckoned, and he accepted the challenge, knowing he would ever be a hunted man. In Pine Valley he would be alone, safe.

Joe squatted on a hundred and sixty acres of Pine Valley land as level as a house floor, and here he built a cabin of logs drawn from the mountain sides. The tumbling water of the Stony emptied into the Pine just back of his cabin door, and pungent sage and bunchgrass reached back to the whispering pines.

THAT winter he set a line of traps up toward the summit on the Stony, going up the fifteen miles one day and back the next. He always carried his rifle, for several cougar tracks crossed his trail after each new fall of snow, and occasionally they followed him for miles. While that first winter did not bring a big catch of fur,—only four hundred dollars' worth,—he learned the ways of the marten, the beaver, the otter, the lynx and the cougar; and best of all, he kept busy.

Late in the spring he tracked a big grizzly over into Fall Creek and came upon the fresh tracks of a man in the new-fallen snow. So he was not the only occupant of Pine Valley! This disturbed him, for he knew the relentlessness of the officers of the law in running down escaped convicts. He turned from the track of the bear to that of the man, as being his greater enemy, and had followed the man's track not more than a mile, when a

cougar took up the trail also, in advance of him. Joe now discovered that the man was wounded and bleeding—for there was a red stain in the snow where he had crossed a gulch. Evidently the hungry cougar was tempted by the scent of blood. Helpless and wounded, the man would be at the mercy of the beast; for though the cougar normally runs from a human being, he is cunning enough to know he can attack a wounded man. Joe hurried on, seeing the man struggling forward a mile ahead of him. Plainly ignorant that the cougar was following only a few rods behind, the injured man sat down to rest under a projecting rock in the warm sun. The cougar poised above for a final leap, and before Joe could bring his powerful rifle to his shoulder for so long a shot, the beast had made his spring. Joe hastened to that scene of horror, but when he finally killed the cougar, the man's flesh was badly torn and his wounded leg was crushed by the powerful jaws of the attacking animal, for, weakened by the loss of blood and a long walk to reach his cabin after an accidental bullet-wound, the man had put up but a poor fight. One hand had also fallen between those teeth, and was crushed and torn. He was half unconscious as Joe packed him three miles to his own cabin and dressed the wounds.

The doctor, brought in haste three days later over the summit, was unable to save Jack Landon's leg; and the mangled hand was left almost useless.

"Where you from, Joe?" asked Jack idly, one day, during his slow recovery. "You haven't always lived here?"

"Oh, no. Back East. Most everyone comes from back there," said Joe, fumbling the information purposely.

"Course, I know that, but what part of the East?" persisted Jack.

Joe wrenched his shoulders as if to free himself of suspicion. It was only natural that Jack should ask, but Joe was alarmed, nevertheless, for he was trying to push the past into the haze of memory.

"I was raised in a shanty among the sticks of Michigan," said Joe.

Jack nodded thoughtfully. "How'd you happen to pick out Pine Valley as a place to come to?"

"Nice valley, Jack," said Joe laconically.

"Pines like they have back in Michigan, maybe. Don't suppose many people will ever come in here. Lonely place."

As Jack was permanently crippled and would be almost helpless for some time to come, Joe moved over to his own cabin all the things from Jack's cabin on Fall Creek. Later on, with rude skill he whittled a wooden leg out of a dry sapling and fitted it to Jack's knee, accepting him finally as a member of the household.

WHEN Government surveyors came into Pine Valley and camped on Joe's claim, locating section corners and making the country ready for settlers, Joe's fears ascended like a flame. He didn't like those little stakes they drove in the trackless waste with the mysterious numbers on them; nor did he trust the men who put them there; for both portended the advance of civilization. Joe considered moving on as the only safe course. Where could he go?

He talked it over seriously with Jack Landon. But Jack welcomed the prospect of a town on Joe's ranch.

"I wouldn't be much good wandering with this wooden leg," said Jack.

It was his friendship for Jack Landon that finally decided Joe on that evening when Jack said: "You only got a week left to make homestead entry on your land, Joe."

"Guess I'll give the claim to you, Jack, and move on into the sticks."

Jack thumped restlessly across the room on his wooden leg. "What could I do with land, Joe? I got only one good hand and one leg. If you move on, Joe, I guess I'll be going too."

Joe considered the advantages of remaining there and taking the chance of being discovered and betrayed, as against those of wandering into the primitive wilderness. But as a man considers his family: his children, their chance of schooling and churches, so Joe considered Jack. He could keep him here, give him a home. To drag him about would be cruel.

SETTLERS soon came streaming in on the vanguard of what was destined to be a land-seekers' boom. A wagon road was started up the bottle-necked cañon, financed by the Forest Service in conjunction with the State, for those pines must be saved from destructive fires. Before the summer was over Joe could see many spirals of smoke curling forth in the early morning before the breeze swished them away.

Late in the summer a family of five settled on the hundred and sixty acres adjoining Joe on the south, and set up a tent close to the river. Joe saw the smoke from the evening campfire and sighed heavily. Hundreds of people had attended his sensational trial, and the courtroom was packed on the day of his conviction and sentence to life imprisonment; his picture, moreover, had appeared in many newspapers. He feared recognition by the newcomers.

THE second evening after his neighbors' arrival, a girl came up and rapped at his door. "I wonder if we could get some milk for the baby. We heard a cowbell on the bench and thought you must have a cow."

Joe's embarrassment and fear gave way to a feeling of security, for she was too young to remember him, had she ever been back East. "Sure, I got plenty of milk. Hard trip for a baby over the summit. How old is he?"

"Nine months."

"That's pioneering with a vengeance," said Joe, bringing in a gallon lard-bucket full of milk. "It wasn't no easy trick driving a cow over that trail, either. Came mighty near not getting here with her. Rolled down one bank for fifty feet, but landed in soft ground. That's all that saved her. Mighty glad I got here with her all right," he said, holding out the milk for her to take.

"Oh, I didn't bring money enough to pay for all that," she said, refusing it.

"This don't cost you anything," said Joe, eagerly scanning her face. He was glad young people had moved in close to him.

"Oh, I'm afraid Mother wont accept it for nothing." Joe's eyes fell as if she had struck him a blow.

"We want to be steady customers until we can get a cow of our own," she added.

"Your mother!" he exclaimed, wondering if by chance, any fatal chance, she had come from Michigan.

She glanced up quickly at his anxious face. Then she laughed. "You thought it was my baby, did you?" It pleased her to disillusion him, for Joe Sommers was still young and handsome, and those troubled depths in his eyes appealed to her.

Joe's face went as red as the sunset on the western rim. Jack thumped across the room to the door and went toward the stable. "Oh, how did your son get crippled?" Her retort, using Jack as a butt for her revenge, made the situation almost ludicrous. She laughed tantalizingly, for it was self-evident that Jack was ten years his senior. He caught the humor of it and laughed also. Before she left, Joe had made a mutually satisfactory agreement with Matie Kay—she was to drive the cow in with her pony, each evening, in exchange for milk.

Struck by an alarming thought, Joe stopped her as she ran toward her pony to ride back to the campfire by the river. "Where are you from?" he called, as if some great issue depended upon her answer.

She stopped abruptly.

"We came from the city. I'm afraid some one will have to teach Dad how to ranch."

"Ever back East—in Michigan?" he asked.

"No, we came from Kansas fifteen years ago." And she rode home.

That was the pronouncement of liberty to Joe. He was safe enough so far as they were concerned. But Matie Kay became another and more insidious danger. Not only did she drive the cow from the bench each night, but, knowing her father's inefficiency as a man of the soil, she came over to watch Joe at work, that she might take home as an investment on their own place some of his vast store of knowledge about ranching.

Joe began to have worried moments. She could never mean anything more than a casual friendship. Could he bring her under the shadow with him? Under the judgment that might crush him any moment? No. He was not free. But that puzzled look she gave him sometimes hurt. . . . .

"I wish I could go trapping with you, Joe, and make some money to help out. There are so many things we need," Matie said frankly one day.

"I wish I could take you along," Joe replied. "And I could, if you were a boy."

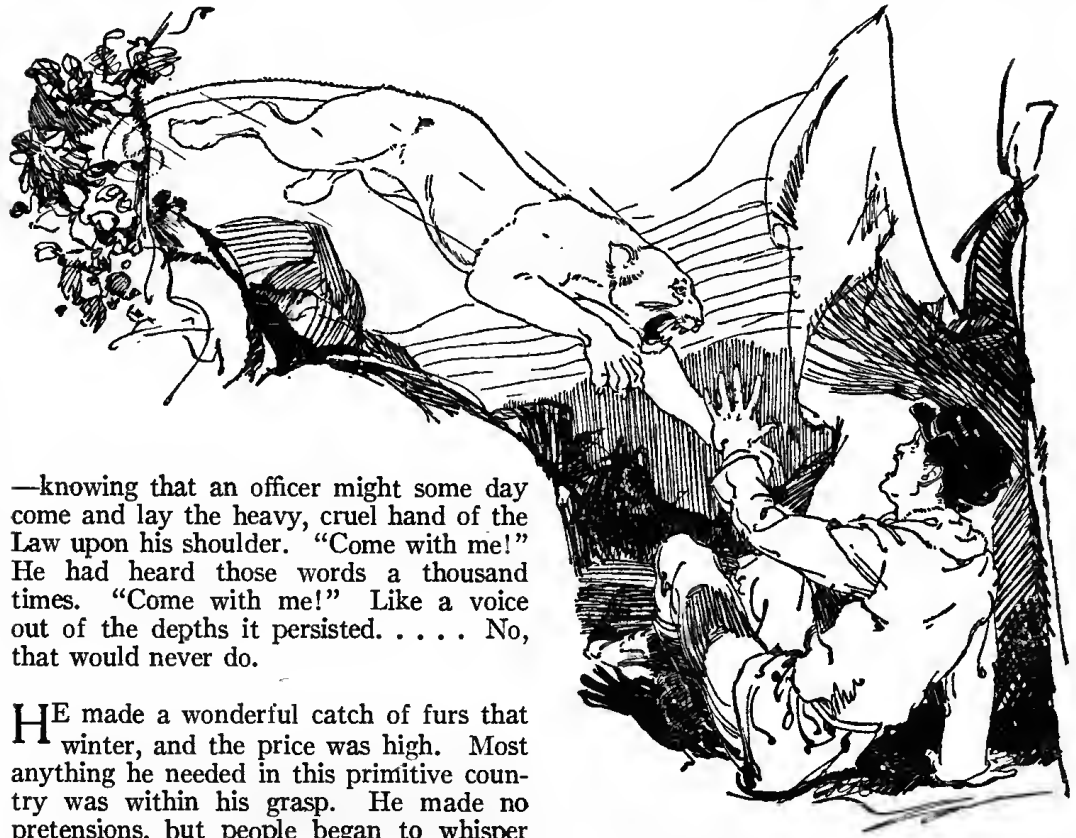
"Do you wish I was a boy? Girls *are* a nuisance in a new country like this," she said.

"You've helped your dad a lot. You have told him how to do everything he has done."

"Well, I've told him what you said he ought to do. You seem to know how and

when to do everything," she said with a sigh. "You don't need anyone to help *you!*"

"We'll see about that," said Joe impulsively. He regretted those words as soon as they were spoken. So long as this prison term was hanging over him, it would be merciless to ask her to share his life



The injured man sat down to rest, and—the cougar made his spring.

—knowing that an officer might some day come and lay the heavy, cruel hand of the Law upon his shoulder. "Come with me!" He had heard those words a thousand times. "Come with me!" Like a voice out of the depths it persisted. . . . . No, that would never do.

HE made a wonderful catch of furs that winter, and the price was high. Most anything he needed in this primitive country was within his grasp. He made no pretensions, but people began to whisper that Joe Sommers was rich.

When the road reached his place at that narrow and crucial point on the Pine, those who lived near by turned to him with expectation and confidence that he would start a town at the mouth of the Stony.

"You're going to do it, aren't you, Joe?" said Matie. Joe had been her ideal too long for her to doubt.

He hesitated. "People around here expect it of you," she urged. "See what it means to them! We must have a store, a bank,—for we will all have money before long, though we have little now,—a post office, and a hotel where travelers can stop. See what it will mean to everyone!"

He smiled. "Just your woman's dreams, Matie. We may need a store." He could get no farther than that.

"It's not a dream, Joe. Everything you need to build a town of two thousand people is here. That would make my father's ranch worth a whole lot, Joe."

"Yes, it would, Matie."

"You are going to do it, Joe?"

"I don't know."

Her eyes were cast down as she walked away. Joe muttered: "Oh, Lord, if I *could* only do it—for her—and for them!"

That summer a man with a four-horse team brought in a stock of goods, and Joe gave him a building site on the new road, in the center of his ranch. The doors of the log building were soon opened, and a freight wagon was put on the road. A house was built for the storekeeper, also one for the freighter, and a stable for the horses. Then a call came for lots and more lots. Stonyville grew like a weed planted in that fertile soil. The ten thousand dollars Joe had saved from his trapline began to grow rapidly.

STEVEN DALE, a friend of the Kays, came to Pine Valley early in the spring, seeking an opportunity to invest his

money, he said—but, in fact, he had followed Matie Kay with a definite object in view. Finding her now a woman and a very attractive one, he decided to cast his lot in Stonyville.

He was not long in making his desires known, but when his proposal came (with her refusal) Matie was horrified. She felt entangled in a web, and struggled to break the meshes that held her tight, for she loved Joe with all her loyal heart. Still, there was something about Dale that was hard to resist.

In desperation she rushed from the counsel of her parents,—who regarded Steven favorably,—and hurled herself at Joe for protection. She found him changing the irrigation laterals down in the meadow.

"Oh, Joe, I am afraid, so afraid—"

Susceptible to her every mood, he responded instantly to her fears. Taking her trembling hand, he led her to the ditch bank and sat down beside her.

"What has happened, my dear girl? Can I help you?"

"Only in one way, Joe. Joe, I can't leave here—and you!" she implored.

At his heart tugged Joe's secret, that barrier that must ever keep him silent.

"Oh, Joe, you can only help me by marrying me tonight!" It did not seem like a proposal—but rather, an answer to the prayer on his lips.

"Sure I will, Matie. I've been wanting to do that for a long time, but—but I'm nothing but a trapper, a lonely old trapper." But he was smiling happily. He had not torn down the barrier—it had fallen to let him pass!

"You are not old, Joe, not much older than I am. They don't need my help at the ranch any more. I must help some one, as God intended, and I want to help you."

"Bless you, girl!" He reached out, drew her to him, kissed her on the lips for the first time. He forgot all about his past—and the shadow on his life. . . . .

Though Matie's sudden marriage stung Steven Dale's vanity to the quick, no one would have known that he had received a crushing blow, for he was a perfect master of self-control. The reason for his coming to Stonyville was not known and so little did Joe mix with people that he hardly knew of Steven's presence in the community until later.

Soon after the marriage, Steven Dale sought Joe out and made his acquaintance. Matie, now tied by the strongest of social bonds, watched this friendship grow with some slight misgiving. Steven was destined to be a power in the growth of Stonyville, and, knowing that Joe needed friends more than anything else in the world, Matie did not warn him against Dale, but she did nestle closer into the protecting arms of her husband.

THREE years' time brought a daughter, then a son. "Why not call him Steven, Matie?" said Joe.

Matie's protest was just short of defiance. To refuse further might cause Joe to wonder why she should object so vigorously.

"You named the girl after your mother, Matie. I should have the right to name the boy after my friend," said Joe, and while Matie never openly consented to that proposal, she withdrew in submission and let Joe have his way.

If Matie had one complaint to make in her choice of a husband, it was because of his utter and persistent retirement. He would never go where crowds gathered—for there were always new faces on the streets of Stonyville. Whenever he met strangers on the street or when they came to him for advice and counsel, he was troubled, until reassured that they knew nothing of his secret.

Matie, in her effort to push Joe upward to the very heights, never missed a chance at the Civic League to make an excuse for Joe's absence. "He works so very hard. He has so many things to do. So many people come to him," she would say. His very silence and retirement surrounded him with an air of wisdom.

"Mr. Sommers," said Dale one day at the house while Matie was rocking the baby to sleep, "I have been around a great deal—a great deal—"

Joe started. "Ever been in Michigan?" The question was forced by Joe's fears.

"Why, no—no," stammered Dale, looking at Joe in an odd way, for the quick interrogation came with such intensity that it aroused his curiosity.

"I have been around a great deal," he repeated, "and Stonyville offers the best opportunities of any town I was ever in. It is not only going to be a thriving little city, but it will attract people by its natural beauty. And there is hunting, fishing, and camping up in the shady pines."

Joe assented. "We are surely growing, Steven." But he listened with misgiving to the beating of hammers.

"I AM going to bring all my money here," continued Steven; "cast my future lot with Pine Valley and try to make Stonyville a town to be proud of." And he threw out his chest.

"Good!" exclaimed Joe, feeling that Steven could take his place as guardian of the village. People would not come to him so often to borrow money. Steven's counsel would be sought instead of his.

"Joe, have you ever considered that the banking business gives a man a standing in a community, which no other business affords? People in difficulty, especially in financial straits, go first to their banker. He always knows everyone's money standing. A glimpse into a man's pocketbook is a mortgage on his success in life. Stonyville needs a bank."

"We would welcome you as the founder of the first financial institution, Steven," said Joe. Steven would be just the man for that position, he felt.

"But I want your support, Joe, financial support as well as moral. I want you to be one of the first stockholders, and a director," explained Dale.

The request struck Joe a stunning blow; would this bring him into contact with people, strange people?

Matie put the sleeping baby on the bed. "Certainly Joe will do this, Steven," she said, coming, so she thought, to Joe's assistance.

"I know nothing about the banking business," said Joe, hesitantly.

"I'll decorate the wicket, Joe, until we need assistance. I'm familiar with banking details." So it was settled by Steven, and the bank commenced to build at once, with Joe's name leading the founders' names. Matie felt very proud of him.

Two years later found Joe Sommers a wealthy man of affairs. He owned the lumber-mill up among the pines, those loved pines along his old trap-line. He loved the sawmill most of all, though it hurt to see one of those old patriarchs of the forest prone upon the ground. He established a brickyard on the clay banks, that Stonyville might have better buildings. He did little ranching now, leaving the overseeing of it to Jack Landon. With the affairs of the bank, the sawmill, the brickyard, and the townsite, Joe was a busy man.

One of the first things Steven did after the bank was paying handsomely was to build a church; and he occupied the pulpit, delivering messages of hope and faith, until a minister could be induced to accept the charge. When one finally came, it was Steven to whom he went to be accepted, and Steven was made sole trustee. As usual, Joe Sommers refused to attend where the public met. So Matie went alone, taking the younger child with her.

Steven, now established in the community, reverted to type—going back to the days when he was courting Matie as a starting point for his revenge. Knowing that a difference of faith may create a delicate situation in the home which sometimes leads to distrust and rupture, Steven Dale drove an entering wedge between Matie and Joe so cleverly that she did not even suspect his purpose.

Steven had created himself usher at the church, stationing himself at the vestibule door to meet all newcomers, and to greet the older members. He met Matie at the door, bowing with a smile. "Why doesn't Joe come to our meetings?" he asked.

"Oh!" She hesitated, for she did not know why—she refused to admit that Joe was an unbeliever in the powers or the grace of God. "He doesn't care to come," she said simply.

Dale wrinkled his brow. "You don't mean that Joe is an atheist?" he said.

That word caused Matie to shudder, and to brush her eyes as if to tear away an obscuring veil. "Oh, I don't know. No," she defended stanchly, "he isn't, but he refuses to come." And she hurried down the aisle to her seat, before he could escort her. Much troubled, she heard little of that sermon. Dale was again at the door when she left. He met her with an ingratiating smile, and took her hand, holding it longer than was necessary.

"I'm sorry Joe doesn't come," he said with a tone that cut her.

"He is taking care of Alice. She always falls asleep when I bring her," she said.

"We need Joe," he said. "I can't think of Joe being an unbeliever. People follow Joe's example. It should be one of faith."

MATIE never talked religion with Joe, but the time came when she took her problems of faith to Steven Dale and discussed them freely with him.

"Oh, Steven, you and Joe are associated in business ventures—and friends should

speak freely with one another. Wont you appeal to Joe for me? He doesn't care to meet people or mingle with them. He should belong to the Civic League and lodge. Joe should have been the one to introduce the Governor when he visited us. He should come to church with me. He knows how to transact business with people; why should he not meet them socially and publicly?"

"He should, Matie, he should!" Steven sighed regretfully, but in fact it was a vent to his own misguided emotions pent up so long in his soul.

"Wont you speak to him, Steven?"

"Yes, I will, Matie, at the very first opportunity." He looked up at her. "I would do anything for you—anything!"

"Oh, thank you, Steven." But he did not let her go.

"I fear Jack Landon has a bad influence over Joe," said Dale. He had long feared Joe's friendship for the cripple; he feared Jack's keen penetrating eyes, his way of digging below the surface of things into men's hearts and souls.

"You think, Steven, that we shouldn't have Jack at the house? I know he has strange ideas upon many things," she said, troubled.

"A friendship that was founded in the desolation and loneliness of Pine Valley before other men came, is not good for Joe. You should have him send Jack away."

"But Jack has only one leg and one arm," said Matie, looking upon the humane side of the problem. "I don't know what Jack would do if Joe should turn him away."

"It has gone beyond that, Matie. What will become of you and Joe if he remains?"

Matie was frightened by his words and his tone. "I will speak to Joe about Jack," she said.

"We were never taught to give our souls in charity—only our money, and things of the world," said Steven, holding her hand in both of his own protectingly.

She withdrew it, conscious of his pressure upon it. "Oh," sighed Matie, "if Joe only understood as you do, if he only liked to meet people as you do, Steven!" Her appeal tempted Steven Dale beyond his usual discretion.

"I'm afraid you should have married me," he said.

Frightened, she fairly fled, leaving him to stare after her. Once he had courted her parents—now he was appealing to her through her faith.

Matie spoke to Joe about Jack Landon, but he would not listen and nothing came of it but several hours of bitterness.

"No," he said finally, "Jack is almost as helpless as a child." Matie had taken full responsibility for her demands—not mentioning that Steven had advised it. "If your God is so merciless, mine is not," said Joe. It ended there, for Matie realized the danger of trying to make the Deity the author of her own selfish desires.

The memories of the friendship welded in the old trapper's cabin were almost a religion with Joe.

While she never spoke again of turning Jack out, her manner toward him changed in a way that he was quick to notice. She no longer welcomed, but merely tolerated him.

Jack put up a cobbler's shop on Main Street and moved all his belongings into the back room. It was not only his cubicle —it was his world.

THEN the terrible thing that Joe Sommers always feared, happened just as he had known it some day would. The blow at first shocked and then stunned him with its intensity. Through the mail he received a letter, postmarked from the city, that paralyzed all his senses.

He was in the post office when he received it. Tearing it open with nervous fingers, he read:

> Mr. Joe Sommers:
> You are an escaped convict sent up for life for killing John Baird back in Michigan. I saw you the day you were convicted and sentenced. I knew you the first time I saw you on the streets of Stonyville—

Joe went ashen white, and trembled like a frosted aspen leaf in winter's chilly wind. His friends noticed that he staggered out of the post office clutching the letter he had been reading. In his room, with the door securely locked to keep Matie out in case she should come to inquire for the mail, he finished reading that condemning letter:

> I'm not going to send you back to prison if you do as I tell you. You are in my power, and a man that don't use his power is a fool. I need money, a lot of money, and I need it very badly. Don't try to find out who I am, or I will turn you back to the law, for I wont take no chances. Leave five thousand dollars with Steven Dale at

the bank for Mr. X, and your secret will be safe.

MR. X.

For an hour he clutched that written page in his iron grip and sat staring into space. No use to save that letter—every word burned its way into Joe Sommers' soul like a brand. He was helpless; he couldn't fight back; he was tied! One false move, and back to prison he would go.

He had no defense. Just a whispered



"I have come to take you back to prison, Frank Leroy," he said.

word, and all was lost! There was no way to silence Mr. X but to do his bidding. He thought of his children, Alice, the older, and Steven, now aged five years, growing to manhood with the father's promise of honor and a respectable name. He thought of Matie, whom he had basely and culpably deceived by his silence. They were his to guard against evil; he must do his duty to them at any cost. Better to leave them penniless than to disgrace their name. Surely Mr. X would go his way when he had robbed him of all he possessed, without visiting his greed upon his innocent wife and children! He knew he must obey that summons at once.

He touched a match to that letter and crushed the ashes in his palm, leaving a black stain. He went out of the house through the living-room, passing Matie, and almost ran to the bank to see Steven Dale.

Steven greeted Joe through the wicket gate with a broad, ingratiating smile. "Something I can do for you, Joe?" he asked.

"Yes, Steven," said Joe in a level, controlled voice. "I need a little money, more than I have to my credit. I need it at once." His voice carried a peculiar message of desperation to Steven Dale.

"Sorry to see you in straits, Joe," sympathized Steven.

"You have been wanting to buy the sawmill for some little time, Steven. I am ready to sell now on the terms you offered a month ago. It is paying well."

"Come into the office, Joe." The transfer of those beloved pines was soon made. "What are you going to do with all this money, Joe?" asked Steven, as a friend naturally would.

"I wish to leave five thousand here in the bank for a Mr. X," gulped Joe. Steven watched, as if fascinated, the misery of that face across the table. "I believe he will call for it."

"Oh, yes, yes," said Steven. "He was in here to see me a few days ago. Said you might leave some money for him. Intelligent-looking man, but I had no idea it would be so much. A man of mystery, eh?"

"It's all right, Steven. Just take his receipt for the money, signed by Mr. X."

Steven smiled. "A little investment perhaps that will pay you better than the sawmill, and you don't wish to let your friends in on it. You foxy old money-grabber!" chided Steven. "Who is this mysterious, well-dressed man, Joe?"

But Joe hurried home as fast as he had come, looking neither to the right nor the left to greet friends. If before he had feared people he seemed now to hate them in his distrust. He seemed to see their fingers pointed at him, singling him out as a loathsome thing.

LETTING business go by default, Joe no longer went to the brick kiln, or attended bank meetings. When people came to talk of lots in his townsite he let them rap at his door and go away. He went to and from his office through the alley, and entered by the back door. Here he sat in the rear room, dazed, as one must who waits to be hanged at dawn.

At the end of two months another letter came from Mr. X, demanding another five thousand dollars. By the time the year had ended, Joe Sommers had also sold to Steven Dale his brick kiln and his bank stock, retiring automatically from the directorate.

It was evident that Mr. X intended to

make Joe a pauper. What then? Would he send him back to the penitentiary? Surely he wouldn't be that despicable, Joe thought, as he weighed the disadvantages to Matie and the children of being poor, as against those of the disgrace which he felt sure would result if he defied Mr. X and refused to give him more.

HE had reached the point where he could keep his secret from Matie no longer, for she must now sign the deeds to the land and would ask questions. But Matie had implicit faith in Joe's ability to handle his own affairs, and she signed the deed to Steven of the townsite and the south forty acres of their valuable meadow-land, without question.

Only their home and eighty acres of land remained. At first he had tried to be cheerful in Matie's presence, but no longer could he conceal his troubles, for deep lines appeared in his face like those made by the floodwaters of a river cutting through the sands.

"Joe, why is it that the men from the mill never come any more to consult you about anything?" she asked one day.

"I sold the mill, Matie," he said trying to evade her gaze.

She started. "When?"

"About a year ago."

"Joe, you never said a word to me about it!" He saw that she was hurt and offended.

"I thought it best not to," he said simply.

"Who did you sell to?"

"Steven."

She was thoughtful for a moment. "Steven is very clever with money matters. I have heard that he is getting very rich here. Everyone trusts Steven. Honesty pays these days."

Joe agreed—he had lied to Matie with his silence; that hadn't paid *him!*

"And you never go up to the brick kiln any more," she said. Her words cut through him.

"I sold that to Steven, too."

She looked at him—just looked. "Joe!" He saw a glint of tears in her startled eyes.

"I sold the bank-stock too," he said, before she should drag that guilty secret from him also.

"And Steven has the townsite and the south forty?"

"Yes," he confessed. "I had to have the money. Steven is about the only one in Stonyville who has money."

"What did you need the money for, Joe?" Matie was one of those old-fashioned women who believe that a husband's failure reflects against the wife. She too had somehow failed!

He was face to face with that question at last. Ought he to tell her of his disgrace and brand her and the children? "I speculated with the money and lost," he finally said.

She considered a moment. "Did you give any money to Jack Landon when he left two months ago?" she asked.

"I didn't have any to give him."

She dried her eyes bravely. "Well, we haven't much left, Joe, but I guess we can make it yet." But he had wounded her sorely, for it was plain that he considered her a stranger to many of his plans.

For an hour Joe sat there staring into space. He thought of flight as a possible means of cheating Mr. X out of his final revenge. In the distant land of Australia, he would have his liberty and Matie and the children could remain honorable in the sight of their friends. Mr. X would not avenge himself against *them!*

THE next demand from Mr. X Joe met with bold defiance. What little remained must go to Matie and the children. He went direct to Steven at the bank and left a letter for Mr. X, telling him that he would pay no more. Steven saw the decision on Joe's face. His lip tightened.

"You haven't given this Mr. X a hold on you, Joe?" inquired Steven.

"I have no more money to invest with Mr. X," said Joe with disregard of consequences. And he went home to wait—wait. . . . .

Steven was more agitated even than Joe. He went to the rear of the bank after Joe's precipitate departure and opened the letter left for Mr. X. He wrinkled his brow, and, opening a drawer of his desk, he took three news-items slightly yellowed with age, from a box. Those news-items had appeared in a weekly newspaper printed in a small village in Illinois, two of them in the same issue.

The first read:

> May 10th.—John Baird, one of our most promising and ambitious young men, left on the morning train for Michigan, where he intends to buy a farm. He has long been a resident here and we wish him much success in his new venture.

At the bottom of the column appeared another item of the same date, in an entirely different tone:

> Bill Snooks left suddenly on the evening train, but informed none of his few friends of his destination. Bill has been a ne'er-do-well in our midst for several years and has doubtless decided to seek his fortune among more gullible people. We regret to say that Bill, though a likable fellow, bas been mixed up in a number of shady deals, and has often been accused of too strong a desire to get easy money. It is doubtful if we sball ever hear of Bill again in this locality.

The third item appeared the following week, and probably had given the village a shock:

> News has just been received of the murder of John Baird in a small Michigan town, where be recently went to buy a farm. We have few details but it seems that John was carrying money about witb him and was sleeping in a barn the night of the tragedy. The motive was doubtless robbery, for after the brutal killing, the criminal set the barn on fire to give the appearance of an accident —but tbe skull found in the ashes bore evidence of a heavy crushing blow and also a bullet-wound. Just as we go to press news arrived that the murderer of John Baird has been taken into custody and all tbe money recovered. The accused man is a young farmer, named Frank Leroy. He lives not far from the barn where John Baird had gone to spend the night. We hope justice is speedily meted out to the guilty man.

Steven Dale smiled cynically, took a piece of paper and hastily typed a brief letter addressed to the warden of the Michigan penitentiary:

> Frank Leroy, who escaped from prison ten years ago, is now living in Stonyville under the name of Joe Sommers.
>
> Mr. X.

Late that night when no one was on the street and after the postmaster had left, Dale dropped the letter stealthily into the post office.

Steven did not sleep well that night. A faint glimmer of light came into his room, past the corner of the church. Where could that light be burning so late into the night? Mentally he traced its course over the harness-shop and down toward the river and that bunch of cottonwoods. He gave a little start. It was Joe's window, no doubt of it—Joe's sleep was disturbed by his defiance of Mr. X! A hideous smile of triumph distorted Steven's face.

Joe expected a threatening demand from Mr. X, but none came during the next few days. Then another possibility troubled him. He knew that the man who robs you will ever be a most bitter enemy. Perhaps Mr. X would feel safer with Joe out of the way, safely behind prison walls.

Joe made a determined resolution and sought Matie. "Matie," he said abruptly, "I may be compelled to leave you before long."

She looked up, stunned. "Leave me! What do you mean?" She would have thought it jokingly said, but for the look on his face.

While she listened, rocking the boy Steven harder and harder, Joe told her his life's story, and told her of Mr. X.

"I should have told you before we were married, about my escape from prison, Matie. I did try to, but somehow the words wouldn't come."

She stopped rocking and swept her hand across her eyes. "It would have made no difference, Joe," she said at last, bravely.

"I should have defied this Mr. X at the very start—but I wanted to save you and the children." He looked down at the sleeping boy. "Neither could I bring myself to confess my guilt in concealing the truth from you all these years. My love for you held me silent."

"I'm glad you didn't, Joe. But it would have made no difference." She looked up with a start. "Joe, you are not thinking of running away?"

He wrenched himself as if to break some bond holding him. "No," he said firmly. "But now you know why I have never wished to meet people, why I actually evaded them."

"I understand, Joe. Forgive me, but I wanted you to go to church most of all. We shall both need God now, Joe."

After Joe went to his room, half an hour's meditation convinced Matie that only by divine intervention could Joe be saved to her and the children. Putting on her hat and coat, she hurried out.

A BIG, well-dressed, keen-looking man about forty years of age boarded the upriver stage at Bend and took his place in the rear seat. Evidently he was a stranger in those parts, for as the four cayuses started out across the bridge and up the dusty road, he watched the passing scenes with interest. The treacherous road ran along the rocky bluffs of Pine River not more than ten feet above the rushing

torrent tumbling over huge boulders. Halfway up the bottle-necked cañon, the mountain scenery in the distance was closed out by the rugged wall of rocks. He now turned to his companion in the rear seat, observing that he had a wooden leg and that one hand was crippled to the point of uselessness.

"Going up Pine Valley to buy land?" asked Jack Landon casually.

"Why, yes—if I can find anything that suits me," replied the traveler.

Jack Landon glanced at those soft, smooth hands, and knew instantly that this man did not come to buy land or to make a home in Pine Valley.

"If you're looking for land, you want to see Joe Sommers," said Jack, craftily, as a feeler.

"He's the very man I am going up Pine Valley to see," said the stranger.

"You'll meet a fine man in Joe Sommers. You find 'em no better anywhere," pursued Jack.

"I have met him."

"See that leg?"—Joe extended the stub of a native pine—"and that hand? Joe saved a cougar from getting the rest of me," said Jack, with enthusiasm.

"Ah, you owe him very much," said the stranger.

"For that, yes, and a great deal since. Joe has one of the finest women—"

"Has he a wife? That's too bad!" The stranger caught himself up, and tried to explain: "Joe Sommers isn't the kind of man who should have married."

"You wont say that when you see his two kids." Jack looked at the stranger intently.

But the man only bit his lip thoughtfully. "Children? That's bad, very bad. Joe Sommers should have known better. It's going to be tough on them when they grow up." He frowned and turned to the scenery, for the bottle-neck was widening with a distant view of the snow-clad peaks, jagged and rough in their rugged grandeur.

"I guess Joe made a mistake, all right," commented Jack Landon, "but the law's made bigger mistakes sometimes."

THE right hand of the stranger went to his breast and clutched the handle of something black. "What do you mean?" he demanded authoritatively.

"I mean your going up to get Joe. That's his house there, the white one. His wife had it painted white. See, there where the Stony comes down through that gash in the hills and empties into the Pine? That's Joe's house. His kids will be asleep when we get there."

The officer who had come for Joe Sommers went direct to the white house, and rapped. Joe opened the door and he stepped inside. "I have come to take you back to prison, Frank Leroy," he said, drawing a pair of handcuffs from his pocket.

Joe had expected this moment so long that he was unmoved by the announcement. "I'm all ready, I guess," he stammered feebly. He was almost glad it was over—that racking suspense. It had eaten into his very being.

"I'd like to see my wife, though, before you start back down the river. She just stepped out. This is prayer-meeting night, and I expect she has gone. She'll say fervent prayers tonight, and many nights," said Joe, looking down.

"All right, Frank. It's too bad you married and have children."

"I've got a boy and a girl," whispered Joe, almost as a confession of guilt.

"Tough on them, Frank. I hope they have a good mother. You are leaving them a little property?"

Joe looked up accusingly. "You got a letter from Mr. X?"

"Yes."

"He got most of my property."

Joe was glad that there were but a few people on the street, that they did not look up to observe the stranger with him—but Joe had withdrawn into a shell of poverty and was no longer interesting to people.

It was a little early for prayer-meeting when Matie left the house, but she wanted to speak with the pastor at his home. She hastened to the parsonage, but seeing a light already in the church thought him there. She went in and turned up the aisle, seeing some one kneeling at the altar rail. It was Steven Dale, who rose to his feet on hearing her approach.

"Steven, hasn't Parson Severens come yet?"

He turned when he heard her voice. "He wont be here tonight, so I came to lead the meeting," said Steven, observing the worry in her face. "You are in trouble?"

"Yes." She was silent a long moment. "Steven, wont you pray for Joe? I fear



"Get out of here," said Steven. "You will bring a curse upon me."

that something terrible is going to happen to us on account of this Mr. X."

She saw an eager desire in Steven Dale's eyes that made her tremble. "You will be all right, Matie," he said. "If anything ever happens to Joe, I will protect you."

"You!" Her eyes flashed. "No, not you. I don't want your protection!" She turned and would have left the church had not Steven caught her gently by the arm. "I thought you wished me to pray for Joe?" he said. She stood a moment, wondering if it would do any good for him to pray for Joe; then she sank to her knees.

Steven had scarcely begun his intervention for Joe Sommers, in a very low and unsteady tone, when they heard the faint sound of steps approaching from the vestibule entrance. Some one had come early to the meeting and would take a seat in the rear. Steven's invocation continued in still lower tones. But the intruder came on up the aisle, one step soft and low, the other a thud of a wooden leg upon the carpet in the aisle.

Steven stopped abruptly, and jumping to his feet, turned to see Jack Landon standing before him accusingly. They looked at each other a full minute—the tension increasing when Matie also arose. Something in Jack Landon's face prevented her from greeting him after two months' absence.

"Praying for Joe Sommers, were you, Steven Dale?" Jack glanced at Matie.

"Get out of here," said Steven, flourishing his arms threateningly. "You are an atheist. You will bring a curse upon me."

"A curse upon *you,* Steven Dale? There's another prayer you'd better make before I leave!" said Jack. "You'd better pray for John Baird, who was thought to have been murdered years ago."

"John Baird!" exclaimed Steven, horror-struck by this mention of the name he had borne until he took that of Steven Dale.

Matie wondered confusedly what it all meant. These two men had come into her life from opposite sides, one to draw her against her will, because he confessed her God, the other to repel her because he was said to be an unbeliever.

"I have been back to Michigan," said Jack. "I visited the little town where you were supposed to have been murdered. *I* also visited the little town in Illinois where you were born. I've got three news-items here in my pocket, Steven Dale. Would you like to see them? Perhaps you could tell something about the man who followed

you on the evening train the day you went up into Michigan to buy a farm."

"No—who?" Steven clutched at the air with his fingers, as if to tear down a picture that hung before his eyes—a picture of struggle, of a face distorted in agony.

So engrossed were the three, that they did not hear the people coming in to the meeting, and gathering about that strange scene instead of taking their seats. Jack Landon had never before been inside the church, and his command over Steven Dale now filled them with amazement. Steven Dale was crushed, humbled—and the crippled Jack Landon, who had always kept his own peace, seemingly held some strange influence over him.

The officer now entered with Joe Sommers, and approached that little circle gathered about the altar.

"Is Mrs. Sommers here?" he asked.

"I am Mrs. Sommers," said Matie, stepping forward to meet the stranger.

"Your husband wishes to see you for a few moments," he informed her.

Steven Dale trembled even more than Matie, for he too understood. "Will you bring Joe Sommers here, please?" said Steven, shaking violently.

Joe stepped forward. He looked from Matie to Steven, and then to his old friend Jack Landon, but was too shocked by that scene to speak even the words he wished to say to his wife.

Before the little group, whom he had so often counseled upon worldly and spiritual things, in the presence of those who had so long admired and revered him for what he had done, Steven Dale spoke the words of self-condemnation that laid him low in their esteem.

"I am John Baird, Joe, the man whom you were convicted of killing fourteen years ago. You had never seen me, but I knew you the first time I came to Stonyville, though I had seen you only once. God forgive me now, as I acknowledge my wrong before you."

He looked at Joe.

"Your mill, brick kiln and everything else I give back to you, Joe. I will leave with the officer in your place. I killed Bill Snooks in self-defense. He followed me all the way from my home in Illinois, knowing my careless habits with money. Those were his bones, not mine, they found in the barn. I have my defense against the law—and now I have my defense with God in my confession."

Free Lances in Diplomacy

"Cherchez la Femme" presents a memorable drama wherein the various actors clash and connive in a most interesting fashion. Mr. New is in fine form here.

BEFORE Thomas Clobbam was returned to Parliament from one of the East End boroughs, he had done all his letter-writing himself. Because membership in labor unions and workingmen's societies had given him far more of it than the average man of the masses gets in a lifetime, it had materially improved his diction and ease in expressing himself. Like most of the labor leaders, he prided himself upon being a plain man of the people—kept his bachelor quarters upon the second floor of an unpretentious house in Stepney where he was close to his constituents, if not in the same borough—and dressed as the average workingman does upon a bank-holiday, even when he spoke upon the floor of the House. During his first few months as M.P., his correspondence naturally increased to such an extent that he was forced to get one of his political henchmen to help him out with it. But this didn't work out satisfactorily for either of them—the temporary secretary finding it too much of a strain upon his vocabulary, and Clobbam having to dictate the wording of too many letters, himself. He was therefore in a receptive mood when the other man suggested his getting some girl from the Board of Trade schools who had been trained for that sort of work.

"It'll be easier, d'ye see, for a gel like that to write a lot o' these letters when ye're not standin' by to correct her, because she'll be eddicated for it—possibly



"You mean they'd sell out? They're both straight, if I'm any judge of men."

By

CLARENCE HERBERT NEW

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson

even better at the trick than you, felley-me-lad. I'm thinkin' ye should get her at once."

"I've thought of it, Dugan—but, d'ye see, my people down here may think it'll be puttin'-on a bit, if I do it—imitatin' the toffs, like."

"Naw—naw—nothink o' the sort! If ye're a bigger man this day than ye were awhile back, 'tis thim that made ye so—they'll be expectin' ye to do whatsomever a bigger man does. 'Tis pride they'll take, seein' ye livin' an' actin' accordin' to your station—because 'tis thimselves ye'll be represintin' among thim toffs in the 'Ouse."

"Could ye name a girl that would do, d'ye think?"

"Well, sir, I'm thinkin' ye might talk with the schools super, an' ask 'im wot 'e could ricommind. 'E'll be knowin' wot 'e's got—an' wot 'e's 'ad the last year or so."

IN this way it came about that Stella Tupper was installed as the M.P.'s secretary, occupying a corner of his living-room with her typing-machine during the day, and having such meals as she ate in the house with his elderly, quite respectable landlady, below. Usually she went home by five or six; when she was busy later than that, the landlady's eldest son was always ready to see her as far as the Tube, or all the way home if she permitted it. At first there was some comment in the borough over their Member going outside for his secretary, but when this got to Dugan, he promptly gave an explanation which satisfied everybody and increased the general respect for their representative's common sense.

"Ye'll be thinkin' 'e should 'ave taken Mary Riordan belike—an' her so well eddicated for the job. Or Jane Burns—wot? Well, d'ye see, 'e says to me, 'e says; 'if I do that, 'tis Pat Murphy'll be askin' w'y didn't I tike '*is* gel—what's eddicated as good as Mary. Or mayhap Fred Thompson, or Steve Grogan would be askin' me the same—they all 'avin' fine gels as is out o' the schools wi' fine ricomminds.' 'Twas to save 'ard feelin' an' give no cause for complaint that 'e gits this outsider—that's specially ricomminded for the job by 'er teachers an' the super."

So that was that. As for the girl herself, Miss Tupper was really much more of a "find" than Clobbam had any reasonable expectation of getting.

When she had worked for a month with Clobbam, giving absolute satisfaction in her secretarial duties, they got down to a general sizing up of each other one afternoon when the heat was oppressive and he suggested knocking off work. She began by asking some rather direct questions.

"Mr. Clobbam—what sort of a job was the first you ever had?"

"Pushing a car in one of the northern coal-pits."

"And then what?"

"Sorter—at the screens an' chutes. Then pick and shovel on the vein itself. Foreman, afterward."

"And—work for the unions, next?"

"No. I wished to see what the big outside was like—as most lads do. Shipped before the mast in one of the Liverpool sailing packets—better than three years. The master was a tall one for boxin'—could handle any man on the ship—en-

couraged us to get up sparrin'-matches—taught us a good bit of the science, d'ye see."

"And gave you the good sportsmanship of fair-play—which I've been rather wondering where you got."

"Aye—boxin' will teach a man that, if he's straight in other ways. Came a time—'twas in Brisbane, I mind—that I'd enough of the fo'c'stle. I went overboard—dropped off the martingale one night, swam ashore with my clothes an' savings in an oilskin. Made for a sheep-range, up the Queensland peninsula, owned by an uncle of mine. He'd not have known me, of course, but identifying myself was main easy. I worked a few months on his range. Nights we talked Socialism, which the old chap was rather keen about—theoretically. I told him I'd been in the miners' an' seamen's unions—meant to have a go at politics when I'd worked my way back to London—said that conditions at the pits were not what they should be. He offered to pay my way home, but I would have none of that—could have bought passage with my savings had I been fool enough. Went down to Sydney an' shipped in the stokehold of a P. & O. boat, homeward-bound. From Tilbury I took a couple of the greasers up with me for introductions at one of the locals. With what I'd learned at the pits an' picked up at sea, the reading an' studying I'd done in my watches below, I was able to pass a number of the Board of Trade exams. Could have gone along up, easily, an' qualified for a third mate's ticket, with a couple of months in navigation. But the local was needing men of my sort. They saw I'd a way with me—before a crowd. So—from that time—I've been a 'political' off an' on."

"AND you kept up your reading!" she commented in some astonishment.

"Well, d'ye see—I had to. There were cases every day where I could see it was giving me advantage. In fact, with a bit of practice in watching my tongue, I fancy I might almost—"

"Go as far as you please? Yes—I fancy you could—though there's more to it than watching your tongue. That's what started me asking all these questions, Mr. Clobbam."

"Well—why? But—we'll get to that later. It'll be my turn now for a few questions. You come from what we class as gentlefolk, do ye not, Miss Tupper?"

"Not quite. I fancy that's a bit of a compliment—the way you put it. My father was a draper, in a small way—Southampton. As a girl of ten I rolled gauze bandages in Dad's shop. He was paid for all the Government took and did rather well at importing other war-material from the States; but after the Armistice everybody was too poor to buy new clothes, and the trade went down to almost nothing until a man bought Dad out for more than it really was worth. That paid for our schooling—his lodge and other insurance gave us a bit more after his death. I'd good advice about putting my share in rubbers, so that I've a bit laid by for a rainy day aside from what I earn. Of course we'd women of quality in Dad's shop every day, while it lasted; I was naturally observant—listened to the way they talked, saw what their manners were like. At school I took on a few studies which usually are supposed to be a bit above our class and paid a woman who was companion to a titled invalid to coach me in a lot of the little things a well-bred woman is supposed to know—and do—or not do. She had me visit her for a fortnight at Entlingdean Castle, and her employer took a lot of interest in me—said I would easily pass for a well-bred girl. Then—this berth with you appeared to offer experience which almost certainly would prove valuable later on—"

"As to—how? How far do you expect to climb? In what way?"

"Well—if you go as far as I fancy you can, Mr. Clobbam, your personal secretary, in time, will be quite valuable to you—worth a very decent salary, with a constantly increasing acquaintance among the bigger type of people. If you stop short of that, my experience with you will have made me valuable to some other Member of Parliament, or some man in large industrial development—and I will have the political acquaintance to recommend me for such a berth. You see, I certainly *can* be of value to you. If you go up—I go also. I've constantly in mind your interests first—and my own all the time. You'll find me loyal. If the time comes when I can't honestly give you that kind of service, I'll say so, flatly—and forget all of your affairs when we part."

"You—er—don't expect to marry, I take it? What?"

"Oh, yes, I do! Every woman does, sometime—though she may get fooled, at

that. But I'll not be able to care for any tuppenny man!" Now—why had he asked her that? Was his interest in her anything but a business one? And could she mold such a man to the really big accomplishments? "You see, he must have at least as much ability as I—preferably a good bit more. I don't know such a man now—perhaps I never will. Meanwhile—I'm rather keen on serving my employer and myself."

"D'YE mind saying, girl, just what was in your mind when we started this bit of talk—the thought which made ye ask about my beginnings?" Clobbam queried.

"No. You've sense enough to understand without taking offense. Dugan has told me you feared your constituents would fancy you were putting on a bit if you employed a personal secretary—and what he said to you about their point of view. Well, he was quite right, was he not? You're their representative, they've already made you a big man in a small way—locally. They'll be equally pleased to make you a much bigger man with a wider sphere of influence—with the full strength of their backing. You may act up to the part or not, as you please—but they'll prefer to have you a good deal less the plain workingman in speech and appearance—a good deal more the type who can meet the toffs on their own ground—join their clubs, hear what they talk and think, from the inside."

"Faith—I'm by no means sure of that, lass! I fancy ye've the wrong notion of their psychology altogether. If they see me talkin' an' actin' like the toffs, hobnobbin' with 'em, it'll make them suspicious of me—make them fancy I'd sell 'em out if 'twas made worth the doing!"

"Why not put it squarely—hear what they say? Tell them it's quite possible that mixing in with the toffs may change your point of view a bit—but that you'll tell them so, man to man, if it does—and why. Say it will do one of two things—make you understand the toffs' side of the argument and look for something in the way of a compromise—or else prove to your satisfaction that their arguments are all wrong and give you inside information which may be used against them in behalf of the workingmen. You'll find, I fancy, that as long as you believe yourself to be straight and honorable, you'll convince the majority of your constituents that you are. Begin to doubt yourself—they'll doubt you too."

"Assume that I find you're right? What would you suggest in the way of getting me to mix in with the toffs on an equal footing?"

"First—there's a consideration which might not occur to you. The Honorable Jeremy Smithers and yourself are, in some quarters, admitted to be among the most influential leaders in the Labor Party—the men who have a larger following than anyone else. It's difficult to say how this would prove up, but I fancy it's not wide of the mark—there are thirty or forty miners in the House, but they'd rather make a row than talk sense. Smithers copies you in the way he dresses, acts, speaks among his constituents. He wouldn't even get a secretary until your example encouraged him to do it. So if you adopt a course to forge ahead and he drops behind, it will lead to comparisons between you—make a good many fancy themselves more certain of his interest in them than they are of yours. If you go up, Smithers must travel the same road and by much the same methods; then there will be less chance for criticism."

"I fancy you make your point—the contingency hadn't occurred to me. Smithers an' I work together very well indeed—trust each other thoroughly, keep side by side in our attitude on the floor of the House. Jolly good team-work—what? Very good! Smithers is in on the proposition if he sees it your way. What next?"

"There is no good reason why you two should dress as shabbily as you do. It's the accepted workingmen's pose, to be sure, but there's no real point to it. Go to a Bond Street tailor, buy good cloth of a quiet pattern which he'll suggest, and have it cut right. When you get a few suits like that, don't make the mistake of coming down to the East End in the old ones—come down looking in a way that'll make them proud of you. Get used to riding in a taxi instead of a bus or the Tube when it will save valuable time and be less tiresome. Have a good caterer serve dinner here in this room for you, Mr. Smithers and myself—every day for a month. I'll show you how to use the various sorts of knives, forks, serviettes—how to act when you take a lady out to dine. Then we'll graduate to dinners in some of the swell West End restaurants for another month—where you will both

keep your eyes open to what the men and women at other tables are doing—how they are acting. I'll give you hints as to which are quite the right sort, and which are very far from that. Afterward we'll dine with friends of mine who have acquired much better taste than the class they were born in—I think they can manage invitations for you to some of the worth-while houses. An M.P. is, after all, *persona grata* nearly everywhere, you know—if he's not too impossible in his manners. All of this will not run to anything serious in the way of money. Mr. Smithers is said to be drawing eight hundred a year from some patents of his which the collieries are beginning to use, and you've some investments outside of politics. When you could both afford it, I would have other suggestions to make."

"Such as—well, what?"

"You should have a valet—a man who knows the proper clothes to wear upon different occasions, who knows what is good taste and what is simply impossible. Not a bossy, impertinent sort of man who would try to make you believe he knew *everything*, but one who has served with the right sort of people and really does know. Such fellows, when one gets a good specimen, are valuable for many services that wouldn't occur to you."

CLOBBAM had followed the girl closely —getting a mental picture of what such a course of instruction would do for him. He had formed the habit of intensive study and wide reading, and knew that Smithers did something along the same line—which explained how they had managed to increase their following among the Laborites. The proposition tempted him strongly, but he was determined to sound his constituents before going very far in that direction. It might prove a boomerang. Stella Tupper had discounted this in her own mind, knowing that a man with his natural ability would go equally far in other fields if his political following fell off.

"Well, lass, I'll think over what you've said for a day or so. It would be worth the doing—no question as to that. I'll sound 'em a bit on what they look for in their representative."

"Oh! Before I go home, Mr. Clobbam, there is a letter that came in the morning post which perhaps you had best read—in case it may be something of importance. It's from a firm of solicitors in Lincoln's Inn—looked rather like a personal matter, so I didn't open it."

He slit open the long envelope with a paper-cutter and took out a typed letter which he slowly read through—and then reread, as though he doubted the facts which it described in a simple, formal statement which had no appearance of being a hoax. Miss Tupper, who had been glancing at his face occasionally, asked if it were anything serious.

"Why—aye, in a way. Shock to me, of course—I really thought a lot of the old chap—supposed him good for another twenty years at least. Something wrong with his heart, they say. My uncle, out Queensland way, you know. Died three months ago. Executor instructed to sell out his sheep-range and other property for the best price he could get an' send the proceeds to me. Solicitors say this has been done—the money placed in their hands. They fancy it'll run to over a thousand pounds a year—possibly a good bit over, if well invested."

"You'll take it, of course?"

"Nothing else to do that I can see! I was the nearest heir the poor old chap had. The more remote ones'll not contest it, I fancy."

"Then I'll offer one more suggestion which this money will make quite possible. Take chambers in some modern apartment-building near Westminster. When you finish a sitting at the House after midnight, it's a long journey down here to Stepney —your sleeping quarters should be within a short walk of Parliament, if possible, and you should have a better place than this to receive the big men of any party when you wish a conference. Get down here in the East End by nine every morning and stay until one—meeting your constituents and borough executives. Keep these rooms, meet them here as usual—stay the night, if there is occasion for it."

THIS was obviously a common-sense suggestion, if he were committed to her plan at all. It quite appealed to him—he saw its possibilities in arranging conferences with various politicals. (What a head the lass had on her, to be sure! He'd been in luck to get her!) In the course of two weeks he had determined to adopt her entire plan, starting the course of table instruction in the new apartment where there was no risk of interruption

or any leakage concerning what they were up to. At the end of the first month the results were noticeable and amazing.

Much to the surprise of both men, they found that the consciousness of being as well-dressed as any of the "toffs" in the House gave them a sense of personal ease in debate which they never before had experienced. It permitted a full concentration upon the subject in hand with no subconscious impression that they were in any particular at a disadvantage. Although neither commented upon the fact to the other, they now realized that the implied inferiority which, previously, they had resented by extra aggressiveness was probably an inner conviction that in appearance upon the floor of a deliberative assembly, comparisons with the aristocratic class were against them. But now, though there wasn't the least slackening in the demands they were making for the Labor Party, they were able, by keen innuendo and clever repartee, to hold their own with some of the ablest spokesmen for the other side. In fact, Clobbam's command of subtle ridicule and marshaling of his statements in an orderly, logical way, more than once gave him the best of it—drawing prolonged applause from the galleries and even from the Members on the benches.

It was a tribute to the excellence of his tailors and his newly acquired valet that the noticeable difference in his bearing and leadership was not associated with his clothes at all. Some of the other Party noticed that his suit, while of much the same coloring as he had been in the habit of wearing, was of finer material and perfectly cut by a sartorial artist, but this elicited only passing comment.



"Why—I suggested it myself! I sometimes carry a gun—and know how to use it, if necessary!"

This was also noticed by two little groups in the visitors' gallery—Stella Tupper being seated near enough one of them to recognize the Earl and Countess of Dyvnaint with two of their more intimate friends and catch occasional bits of their subdued comments. They, in turn, were near enough two other men beyond to catch occasional muttered remarks. One of these two Miss Tupper knew to be Lord Brilingdean from his having called upon Clobbam several times in the past month, but the man with him was, from his accent, a foreigner. She couldn't recall having seen him before. They had been closely following the points made by the two leaders on the floor, and presently appeared to be considering them more seriously because of their evident poise.

"Even stronger t'an a few months ago, my friend. Yes?" remarked the foreigner.

"Not much question as to that, I fancy," replied Brilingdean, "but I can't make out

just what they've in mind—ultimately. There has been a marked change in both, of late. I never was more surprised than at Clobbam's cheek in asking the Marquess of Arlincorn if he could recommend a really first-class valet. Fancy! A former miner-chap—from Stepney, mind you—wantin' a valet! Not some bounder out of a berth, but a gentleman's man. We three were discussin' the debate in a corner of the lobby—I said I'd give him an address or two, later, but there was no shuttin' him off. He told Arlincorn that his man Middleton had struck him as bein' exactly the right type—hit the old boy in one of his pet fancies—he thinks Middleton quite a perfect valet. So he insisted upon havin' the man look up some one he could recommend an' send him along to Clobbam.

"Our friend is really no fool, y'know," pursued Brilingdean, "—fancy he'd the idea that anyone I sent might be discussin' his affairs with me, at times. Well—give Middleton's selection credit for the taste in clothes, and possibly a few other little hints —that doesn't explain Clobbam an' Smithers dining with ladies at the Carlton an' knowin' how to handle the tools by their plates, or the ability to carry on a social chat without making rather inexcusable breaks. Of course they're stronger than they were! Why not—when they've managed to increase their personal value by more than half? Can't be that they're lookin' for a knighthood among the next Birthday honors—'cause there seems to be no pretext for it, an' they'd lose a good bit of their following. There's a woman back of all this somewhere—I'm convinced as to that! But who is she, what her object may be, whether she'll block what we expect to accomplish through these two or not—I can't decide."

"Suppose t'ey 'ave discount ze loss among t'eir following—look for sometheeng bigger?"

"You mean they'd sell out? First place, they're both straight, if I'm any judge of men. They're better leaders for the Labor side than they were before—knowing how to argue against the Conservatives along their own lines of attack. Neither Socialists nor Laborites have anything to complain of so far—quite the reverse. But assuming that you may be right, who would buy their ability—for what purpose?"

"It would be a 'eavy blow to ze Labor men if ze Conservateeve win t'em ovair. Ze Conservateeve w'ips would pay mooch for t'at, I theenk."

" 'Twould be a criminal offense, you know —bribery. No, I fancy none of them would risk it. But if those two are as ambitious as they seem,—not too scrupulous, as long as they remain within their own party,—I'm not so sure you couldn't make them a proposition, Drinoviev."

"Myself, I theenk of t'at. But—I wait ontil you tell me you 'ave ascertain' ze offer would be keep in strict confidence—an' you are sure t'ey would consider heem. T'ey are of ze Lef' Wing—mos' true; but each wing 'ave ze extreme tip at one end, an' ze othair end more solid, nex' ze center."

THE Earl and Countess had caught but occasional fragments of this talk, but were able to guess at what they hadn't heard and form some idea of the relations which might exist between the two men. Lord Brilingdean was one of those throwbacks from his own order who openly aided the Labor Party—an avowed Socialist who had converted all of his real property except one small country estate into cash which he had invested in rising securities. It was known that he had materially increased his fortune, and that he had given large sums to the striking miners, but how much he actually was worth and how much he had contributed to labor organizations, it had been impossible to find out. Miss Tupper failed to catch these almost whispered remarks between the Earl and Countess:

"If actual business relations could be traced out between some Moscow financier and Brilingdean—eh, George? And if Clobbam were known to be handling much larger sums than his recent legacy would account for? It's really rather a temptation to go into this a bit, myself! Might turn up a lot the Governm'nt should know —what?"

What Miss Tupper *did* catch, however, between Countess Nan and her two friends was of sufficient interest to stick in her memory, though it gave her no hint of what Her Ladyship had in mind.

"You've met our lovely American friend Mary Lester, have you not, Helen?" said Nan. "Lammy has, at all events—he'll sing her praises to you half the night if you let him! A star of the cinema, you know —over here for a rest. You meet her at some of the best houses in London—per-

fectly charming! Well, here is a situation she would enjoy immensely—and get a plot out of it for one of her pictures, whether there actually is one or not. Suppose she happens to meet our friends Clobbam and Smithers of the Laborites down yonder—and Lord Brilingdean, farther along the gallery, here—a turncoat peer who is openly against his own class and order? Suppose she builds up a supposititious triangle between those three and her lovely self? What do you fancy would be her reactions toward them? More particularly—what would be their reactions toward her?"

"Three men—fighting, aggressive ones—and a woman as beautiful as you say she is?" replied Countess Nan's friend. "Coffee and pistols, I fancy!"

"Rather intriguing—what? Do you know, I'm almost tempted—"

"Yes? To do what?"

"See that the proper introductions come about in an apparently casual way—and watch what happens."

"After listening to those two men on the floor,—quite excellent friends, I've heard,—I fancy it might prove interesting to have them introduced, and see—how long they would remain such very good friends. If they have political relations with Brilingdean as you rather imply, see how long those relations continue—eh? (I fancy you *might* be rather keen about throwing a brick into the Radical machinery, Nan—they certainly don't play on *our* lawn!) I say! Could you induce your beautiful American to come to me with Lammy for tea, some afternoon this week? (You'll not want to appear in the affair, of course.) I'll take her along to one of the houses where either or all of those men are likely to turn up. She may not see as much in the proposition as you do—"

"But—she will! It's the sort of a tangle she's frequ'ntly done on the screen—and she'll enjoy pitting her wits against theirs to see how hard-headed they may prove to be. I'll make a bit of a wager with her—just to get what she would call 'more kick' out of the affair."

Stella Tupper went home that night with rather mixed feelings. She was positive that neither Lord Brilingdean nor his Muscovite friend had caught a word of this. Having missed the murmured remarks between Countess Nan and the Earl, she hadn't the least suspicion of anything political in what that popular lady was planning with the Baroness. The name Mary Lester was not familiar to her until she saw a picture at the cinema in which the lady appeared. It was supposed, of course, to be none of Stella's affair who the Labor leader met in society, or how any particular woman affected him. But for the present, at least, Clobbam's interests were her interests; and she was beginning to feel an increasing liking for the man. As to Brilingdean, Stella would have been well satisfied to see a break between him and Clobbam. His Lordship was beginning to give her an impression of an unscrupulousness which made him a dangerous man to be associated with—though she had no actual proof of occurrences she thought might have been traced to him.

CLOBBAM'S first impression after meeting the most beautiful woman he ever had seen, at a house in Park Lane, was that something not in the least understood had happened to him. For an hour he didn't associate it with her—the introduction had been too obviously casual for any prearrangement. Then he caught a glimpse of her going into the conservatory before the other guests had come back from the supper-room—and followed. She was seated in a niche behind some low palms, and moved her draperies aside to make room for him—and even at the risk of giving offense, he couldn't avoid drinking in the exquisite loveliness of her. Although he hadn't connected the undercurrent of gossip with her before, he now realized that she must be the beautiful American whom all of the guests were talking about in terms of thorough appreciation—even the women. It seemed like telepathy when she presently asked with a dimpling smile:

"Are you really a bit unusual, Mr. Clobbam—or is my imagination crediting you with qualities outside of your equipment?"

"Why—er—fancy your asking that! It's rather like what I've been wondering about you, d'ye see—ever since we were introduced—though possibly I didn't realize it until now. Of course there'll be nothing unusual about me, that's pure imagination! Very complimentary of your mind to work that way, I'm sure. I'm just the ord'n'ry Member from a workingmen's borough—with my work cut out, I'll assure you. But in your case there'll be something I've not noticed in other women. Not a ladies' man, d'ye see—experience almost altogether with men of the rougher type. So possibly

I'm overstepping the conventions by putting it so bluntly that I've had you in mind the whole evening. In some of my reading on psychology, I remember 'twas stated that certain types of men always are attracted by as definite types among women. However—pardon me—I fear I'm not int'resting you."

"You're complimenting me rather plainly, Mr. Clobbam, but I'm honest enough to admit that it's not offensive—within reasonable limits. Suppose I return the ball? If you're just the average M.P. from the East End, as you say, how do you account for the noticeable change in your manner, your appearance, your grasp of debate on the floor, during the past three or four months? I've been in the visitors' gallery several evenings since I came to London a few months ago."

"If there really is any difference, I fancy I must give the credit to my secretary Miss Tupper. After she had been in my employ a month or two, it must have occurred to her that I needed overhauling, in spots. At all events, I saw that things I said and did appeared to annoy her. Out of curiosity I asked why—and she didn't hesitate overmuch about telling me. I didn't need to question how she knew she was right, because her manner, speech and actions showed that she knew the difference between good and bad taste. So I said I'd take no offense if she went as far as she pleased—with a deal of plain-speaking. My word! I got some of it—no doubt!"

"You must have had exceptional luck, Mr. Clobbam—the girl evidently is a wonder! Do you know, I'd like to meet her some day, if it wont inconvenience you?"

"Nothing would give me greater pleasure, Miss Lambton!" he exclaimed, as he began to see possibilities of têtes-à-tête with this lovely woman.

"We have luncheon at my chambers every day when I return from Stepney—about half after one—sometimes with one or two of the Members dropping in, sometimes quite by ourselves, when there is important work to be gone over. I fancy it would be conventional enough with her as chaperon. What?"

"Oh, I never consider trifles of that sort. In the States a woman can usually take care of herself and her reputation—especially if she is before the public in any way."

"Which reminds me! May I ask if you ever are known by another name, Miss Lambton?"

"What gave you that impression?"

"Well—I saw one of the American productions at the cinema the other night, in which the star was Miss Mary Lester—they claim over there that she is the most beautiful woman on the screen or stage. And—er—if you are not Mary Lester, you must be her twin sister! Really, you know, you couldn't convince me that you're not!"

"I've been taken for her by a number of people. If you fancy I'm Mary Lester, I sha'n't bother to argue the matter with you. I was christened Lucy Lambton when a couple of weeks old—so you're quite safe on that name, at least. When am I to lunch with you and Miss Tupper?"

"Tomorrow, if you'll be so good. I'll put over a couple of Members for another week, or meet them somewhere else!"

SHE smiled openly at this as she said: "See here, Mr. Clobbam! Have you a strain of American blood? Aren't you a bit rapid for an Englishman? I didn't know they could think that fast! I'd like to have the lunch with you as soon as I can arrange it—but there *are* a few engagements of my own, you know. And tomorrow I'm motoring down with Lord Brilingdean to his estate in Bucks."

"Brilingdean, eh? It hadn't occurred to me that you knew him. House-party, I suppose?"

"Not unless it's a very small one. He said that some of the county people usually dropped in for the evening when he was known to be at the place, but we're motoring down by ourselves. I fancy it must be a lovely old house, from his description,—it was hinted to me that he might eventually sell it as he has sold all of his other property. Might be something I'd like to purchase, you know."

"H-m-m—I rather doubt if it comes up to your expectations. His ancestral castle in Wales was a much more beautiful place—I've heard an Argentinian gave him twice what it was worth. I wonder if you would humor me a bit, Miss Lambton? Cheeky to ask upon so short acquaintance, of course—but there's really an excellent reason for it.

"Tell Brilingdean you'd rather he'd take at least one other couple down with you. Americans find it very difficult to understand the difference in viewpoint between the two countries. A woman can motor half the night with a chap over there and spend the rest of it in a ranch-house with-

out really serious comment—though one doesn't quite understand how she does it without getting into difficulties. But over here—well, it's done at times, but with a vast deal of personal risk. It would be unpleasant, for example, if you found your invitations to our best houses rather unaccountably dropping off, d'ye see. All this is no reflection upon Brilingdean, whom I know very well—except that he knows he shouldn't have suggested such a thing to you."



There came a knocking on the door—the women barely had a chance to pick up their belongings and disappear.

"Why—I suggested it myself! I sometimes carry a gun—and know how to use it if necessary!"

"Well—if you killed a man in the States and were brought into court looking as you do this evening, probably any jury in the country would acquit you. It's a habit of theirs over there. But in England you'd have to prove it self-defense or you'd hang—no argument about it. And deliberately putting yourself into the compromising position would weigh quite heavily against you. It's really much the easier way to avoid the dangerous situations."

"In that case, I think I'll make some excuse to His Lordship and accept your luncheon-invitation for tomorrow. I've rented a nice little house in Chelsea for the season—come for me there at one, if you will—I have my own car."

Back in his chambers, Clobbam was scarcely conscious of his valet's noiseless movements about the suite—putting the evening-clothes upon hangers, the shoes on their trees, laying out pajamas. One absorbs luxurious habits very quickly, and his mind was full of smoky brown hair, dark eyes, the most perfect nose and lips in the whole world. He was tempted to ask his man what he knew about her, but shrewd enough vaguely to understand that the sort of man he was trying to be does not discuss his women friends with even well-trained servants.

"Monkton!" The man came noiselessly in with his dressing-robe.

"Yes sir?"

"One of my friends is having luncheon with Miss Tupper and me at half after one tomorrow. I shall have her put over to some other time the Members who were to be here—and you will see that I have no other callers until four at the earliest. Er—could you think up a not too elaborate menu which would be exactly right? I'm rather keen upon having it something beyond criticism—flowers in the best taste, all that."

The man bowed.

"With your permission, sir, I will see the Honorable Mr. Smithers' man before breakfast and ascertain what he served for Mr. Smithers and a lady from the American cinema on Tuesday—so there will be no

chance of following it too closely if your lady should happen to know the other party. It was to have been very much the sort of luncheon you describe, sir—not too elaborate, but quite unusual. Then—if you permit the suggestion, in a manner of speaking—it will be most excellent practice if you block out for me what you yourself fancy would be about right, sir. You are showing very good taste in certain ways, sir—may be ordering for a party of ladies in one of the smart restaurants almost any evening, so that a nice discrimination in this line will come in very handily. If I think you are in error at any point, you will doubtless permit my calling attention to it. Icing a vintage Burgundy, for example, is a mistake one quite too frequently notices in those who are inexperienced."

WHEN the man had left him Clobbam felt a vague sense of disillusionment. The lady whom Monkton had so discreetly referred to as having lunched with Smithers could be nobody else but Miss Lambton. As far as he knew, there was no other American cinema-star receiving invitations to the very best London houses at the time—none who would attract Smithers' notice to the extent of getting her to lunch with him in his chambers—properly chaperoned, of course. No denying that her beauty and fascinating manner would attract any man lucky enough to interest her—he certainly couldn't hold that against old Jeremy. But he very much wished that he had known her for some time, first.

Next morning, he was driven down to Stepney an hour earlier than usual and had returned by ten—finding Stella Tupper at work upon the mass of correspondence and political documents in his study. He asked her if she ever had seen or heard of an American by the name of Lambton. The name was vaguely familiar to her from the social columns of the gazettes, but that was all. He gave her some description of what had happened during the previous evening and the luncheon-appointment for that afternoon—saying the lady had expressed a desire to meet her, after hearing what she had done for him. Stella experienced a warm thrill at the man's honest decency in speaking of this to a stranger—wondered if she *was* occasionally in his thoughts, after all. Then he went on to describe the lady's beauty, his blocking Lord Brilingdean's insulting invitation—and suspicion came streaking through the secretary's mind.

"You say Miss Lambton is an American? Are you quite sure that is her real name?"

"As it happens—yes. She is known in the cinema as Mary Lester."

"Oh! I saw her in one of the American pictures last week—no wonder you're rather batty over her looks! I fancy about a million other men are even worse! And she's really coming here in a couple of hours? My word! I'm very highly complimented!" Knowing what she did, Stella was nothing of the sort, but she thought it better sportsmanship not to tell him what she knew. "And really—I'm delighted that you blocked His Lordship so handily! I detest that man! Hate him worse every time he comes here! He's up to something dangerous, somewhere—though I can't imagine what it is!"

"Why? Do you know anything at all against his character?"

"Yes. It may be to the advantage of the Labor Party and playing your game for him to betray his own class and come over to extreme Socialism, give your organization large contributions—all that, but a man who will do it out of pique against his own order, or for petty personal spite, will betray his country and his government to foreigners with just as little hesitation! I'm told that he has contributed thousands of pounds—yet I happen to know of one case where he evicted a tenant who had a bedridden mother and a dying sister—turned them out upon the road with what little furniture they had! I can't see how any workingman can take a shilling from a man like that! And he's seen going about with too many foreigners to please me—one or two Russians, particularly."

"H-m-m—you're giving pretty good reasons for my instinctive dislike for the chap, Stella. I'd not heard of that affair with his tenants, nor of his hobnobbin' with the Russians—but I've received from him sums for our political organizations far in excess of what it seemed he could have realized from the sale of his property, though 'tis said he made a deal by speculation."

A LITTLE later Stella found Miss Lambton charming—as much so in her winning manner as in the artistic beauty of her face. Knowing of Countess Nan's suggestion concerning a wager, and that the girl had deliberately arranged an acquaintance with these three men to see what



"Go around and let yourself in the private door! Listen — but don't make a sound!"

sort of a dramatic plot their reactions might suggest to her, the secretary was quite sure that the lady had no serious intentions with Clobbam. Her admirers were far too numerous, wherever American pictures were shown, for that. And if Clobbam were singed a bit in the game—well, eventually he would make his admiration platonic with as good grace as he might. All three were liking each other better with each passing moment, and thoroughly enjoying the masterpiece which the Member and Monkton had concocted between them, when the house-telephone rang sharply. Monkton answered it—saying that his employer would be engaged until four and positively could see nobody until that time. He recognized the voice at the other end, however, and finally was forced to whisper in Clobbam's ear that Lord Brilingdean was in the lobby, insisting upon coming up—a matter of importance which must be settled before certain men took the boat-train for Dover that afternoon. As they had practically finished their luncheon, Stella suggested that she and Miss Lambton retire to the study until Clobbam succeeded in getting His Lordship out. While they were considering this there came an insistent knocking upon the door—and the two women barely had a chance to pick up their belongings and disappear before Monkton had to open it.

Clobbam was very much out of humor at all this, and remained standing when Brilingdean came in.

"I trust this wont happen again, Brilingdean! The house manager has seen you coming up to my diggings so frequently that I fancy he supposed it must be quite all right when you insisted—but he'll get his orders from me pretty straight after this! Now tell me what you wish—and then take yourself off for the present. I'm annoyed, I assure you!"

"Really—I cawn't say I relish your tone, Clobbam!" This with a cold, contemptuous stare. "Particularly, when I've put myself out gettin' here to do you a service! I say! Where's that girl? In yonder? Have her out! Send her away for an hour or two! What I have to say is strictly confidential —I'll take no chance of bein' overheard by anybody! An' there may be others here to confer with us, later."

This was a proposition which Clobbam didn't relish at all—seeing the obvious position in which it would place Miss Lambton if she were discovered in the study. But a thought occurred to him the next moment, so amusing that it was difficult to

keep it from showing in his face. Calling Stella out of the study, he lockedthe door and shovedthe key in his pocket—telling her of Brilingdean's request. But when he let her out, he stepped into the hall for a second and slipped another key into her hand, whispering: "Go around to the little side passage and let yourself in the private door! Listen—but don't make a sound!"

WHEN he returned, His Lordship had made himself comfortable in a chair by the window and had lighted a cigar.

"Clobbam! You probably understand that I am but one of several men in the Upper House who sympathize with the aims of your party and are willing to help it as extensively as our means permit—a good bit more than you've received from us yet. In discussing the present situation, we believe it will not serve your interests or the political conditions we wish to see brought about if the miners' strike is settled along any of the lines under discussion. We all thought a blunder was made when you called off the big strike awhile back—but admitting for argument that the time wasn't quite ripe for a show-down, we are certain that another opportunity will very shortly occur in which you must push the advantage, even with extreme measures. Now, it's said that you received a legacy a few months ago, but it probably wasn't so large that you would be averse to having your income increased still more—quite materially more. Eh? Of course not! No man would! You're valuable to us as a leader—you're handling contributions honestly, without bond—and you've received no consideration for these services. But unquestionably you're entitled to it—Smithers also. Very good! In a nutshell—if we make you both handsome allowances for personal and political expenses, will you be advised by us in pushing advantage home when you get it? Will you distribute for us sufficiently large sums to keep the strikers and their families in more or less comfort while they are out of employment?"

"How large sums—for example?"

"Millions—if they are needed!"

"Who's giving them? Where are they coming from?"

"That's none of your affair—as long as you get them!"

"I differ with you as to that! British money might be permissible—to the extent of preventing actual want among starving families. Foreign money is something else again. There are no labor organizations in the world in possession of any such millions to give us. Russian money to foment and maintain chaotic trade disturbance in Britain is obviously unacceptable. Every penny you give us must have an honest pedigree before we accept it. We'll know precisely where it comes from!"

"Clobbam—you're a fool! You're standing against your own best interests—and you're in no position to take that tone with me! Ten thousand pounds was what we had in mind for your personal expenses—more if you thought 'twas needed. And we're asking nothing but what you're preaching on the floor of the House. Are you merely bluffing—up there?"

"No—we're trying adequately to represent the workingmen of the United Kingdom. All of them! Not—one little group of soreheads! We really aren't getting anywhere, Brilingdean, and you'll have to excuse me now—I'm busy this afternoon."

Brilingdean sneered openly.

"Suppose I refuse to budge until you've listened to reason from others who are coming? We're quite in earnest, Clobbam! We'll certainly break you if we're antagonized too far!"

"I'll not listen to anyone else on this subject—which is out-and-out criminal bribery. And if you don't leave my diggings, I'll forcibly put you out of the building!"

"Are you able to do that?"

"Quite!"

"At the risk of my stating that you were lunching here alone with a very beautiful woman who had made a previous engagement with me—that you are neglecting Party interests, selling out your constituents because of an infatuation which makes you useless for anything else?" He held up a dainty glove which he had picked from the floor under the table. Clobbam's eyes blazed for a moment—and then he laughed.

"Why—aye—you rotter! If I must take that risk, I suppose I must—though I'll be sorry for you if anything comes of it. You'll not get out of hospital for some time! You see, you insisted upon my sending Miss Tupper out, but nothing was said concerning our guest—who has doubtless overheard every word of your proposition to me. After your insulting suggestion to her for this afternoon, I rather doubt if she will feel like shielding you at her own

expense. Frankly, what you have been talking is out-an'-out treason against His Majesty's Government, you know—"

JUST then, there came a loud and nervous rapping upon the door. When Clobbam opened it, Smithers hurried in—looking rather upset when he saw His Lordship there—and then somewhat relieved.

"Hmph! Glad I found you together! Now we'll be going into this a bit—confidentially! Has he made any proposition to ye, Clobbam?"

"Merely tried to bribe me with Russian gold—stolen gold, at that! Tried to force us into using it against our own Government!"

"Ye're sure of that, are ye, Tom? How are ye so?"

Brilingdean held up the glove—passed it over to Smithers.

"Perhaps from the lady who dropped this glove. She's a Yankee! Americans don't care what they say—never bother about the proof!"

"It's a liar ye are, Brilin'dean! Where got ye this glove? An' when?"

"Under that lunch-table—just now. She was lunching with him all by herself when I came up—he'd only time to lock her into the study yonder! Let's have her out—eh?"

Clobbam took the key from his pocket and unlocked the door—in which the two women appeared, with disgust plainly showing in their faces as they looked at the rotter by the window, who was giving an excellent representation of a man seeing more than he bargained for. Smithers understood at once that no possible impropriety could be charged against Miss Lambton or her host, with Miss Tupper to chaperon them—but the idea of her lunching with his confrère in this intimate way upset him more than anything had for some time.

As for Brilingdean, he contemptuously felt that these two meddling clods had done him out of a piece of goods so fine and desirable as to be entirely out of their class—or reach. After he and Smithers had left the building, Miss Lambton confessed to her hosts that she had made their acquaintance, at first, with the idea of seeing what would happen in such a mix-up when it was evident that each of the men had been paying her devoted attention—but she added, with a smile:

"I think my experiment has done your Government a service, Mr. Clobbam, even if you feel that I shouldn't have taken this liberty with you. Some of your Foreign Office men were telling me last month that they knew large amounts of Russian money were being used throughout England, but that they had no way of proving its use for actual conspiracy against your Government. From what I heard this afternoon, however,—and Miss Tupper took down in shorthand,—you've got that turncoat, Brilingdean, with the goods, as we say in the States. Those notes, with our sworn affidavits, will be in Downing Street within the hour! They'll probably be satisfied to send the scoundrel out of the country, I suppose—but my friends the Trevors will publish the facts in full, through the news syndicate they control. As for you, Mr. Clobbam—let me say that, while I don't agree with your political views, I consider myself honored by the friendship of one who has made himself a gentleman of character and integrity against rather staggering handicaps. You'll remain my friend, I hope, for many years. Miss Tupper will agree to that, I trust?"

"Yes—heartily! But I fancy it had best be 'hands across the sea.' He'll not do much political work or see anything in other women as long as you're in England. To a man with a political future before him, you're a catastrophe, Miss Lambton!"

AFTER the two left the Foreign Office that afternoon, Miss Lambton dropped Stella Tupper at her lodgings and was then driven to the famous Jacobean mansion of Earl Trevor in Park Lane where she disappeared in the upper regions—where "Miss Lambton" completely disappeared until there should be some other occasion for resurrecting her. In the big library after dinner, Countess Nan gave her husband and their two old friends a detailed account of her impersonation. When they had stopped laughing, Earl Lammerford summed up these results:

"You've exposed the channels through which the Russian gold was being distributed, Nan—and plugged it up for a while at least. You've sown dissension among the ablest leaders the Laborites have on the floor of the House—and you've shown the decentest one of the lot that his own secretary may prove better wifely material than even the most beautiful woman in America—in the long run. Faith—I fancy you might consider this the end of a perfect day. What?"

The first of a specially amusing group of tales of the open road—the modern motor-road whose possibilities of humor and adventure are so limitless.

Illustrated by Frank Hoban



"About nine o'clock Miss Carson comes over. Nothin' would do but I come and eat a couple of quail."

The Tub Plays Sheik

By

E. WHITMAN CHAMBERS

A FOOL will rush in and crash the gate while an angel is waiting in line at the box-office.

That corrupted proverb explains, in a measure, how I came to start out on a tour of the National Parks with two such hair-brained idiots as the Eel and the Tub, christened respectively Johnny Holt and Fenwick Dallmoreton Lurb. I was a fool—no sane man would have gone a mile with them.

The matter first came up the day after commencement. I was busily packing my sheepskin and my knickers, anxious to get home and hang out my shingle proclaiming myself a full-fledged attorney, when my two classmates burst furiously into my room.

"Pack your clothes, Grant," the Eel ordered. "We're leaving in the morning."

I surveyed Johnny's lank frame scornfully for a moment, as he draped himself snakily over the back of a chair.

"No, you're wrong. I'm leaving tonight," I told him.

Fenwick Dallmoreton Lurb thrust his fat, cherubic countenance in front of mine and grinned sagely. "Don't contradict us, Grant. You are leaving in the morning—with us."

"How interesting!" I murmured without interest. "And where are we going?"

The Eel straightened up and told me briskly, with much waving of his angular arms. "You and me and the Tub are going to make a tour of the National Parks together in my car. We are going to take in Yosemite Valley, Grand Cañon, Mesa Verde Park, Yellowstone and Crater Lake. We shall be gone three months and shall cover approximately five thousand miles. Between you and me, it will be quite a frolic, besides being a liberal education. And heaven knows, the Tub and I need some kind of an education. We didn't seem to acquire much here."

"And who, might I ask, will pay our expenses for this five-thousand-mile trip?" I asked coldly.

"The Belmont Motor Company," Johnny Holt declared pridefully.

"Elucidate, Johnny!" I ordered.

"Here's the dope," the Eel plunged on enthusiastically. "My dad is the proud owner of a Belmont automobile. I have just been in conference with the Pacific coast sales-manager of the Belmont Company. He offered to give me one thousand dollars in cold, hard cash, if I would drive our Belmont over the Meyers grade into Lake Tahoe before any other car this season. The road is closed by snow now, of

course, and I've heard that there are three or four cars up there near the summit, all ready to dash over as soon as the snow melts a little.

"Naturally, it means a lot to an automobile company for their car to be the first over the summit. You've seen the big page ads that come out in the newspapers every spring: 'Sturdy Gazook Four is first car over Meyers grade. Battling snow and ice and mud, this stanch, reliable car reaches Lake Tahoe on its own power. Competitors for honor left stranded in snow.' You've seen the ads, Grant. You know how they run. Only this year it will be the sturdy Belmont which wins the ground-glass headache tablets. And she'll be driven by John Holt."

THE Eel threw out his chest pridefully. "Not bad, eh, kid?"

I nodded skeptically.

"And what makes you think you can beat all these other cars?"

"Ah!" Johnny was very mysterious. "That's the secret. We'll beat 'em. You can lay your money on that. I have an idea which is bound to be a winner. And the thousand bucks will carry us on this tour of the National Parks which the Tub and I have worked out at the expense of much mental effort."

"A thousand will never do it."

"Course it will."

"But think of the hotel bills for three men. The meals, to say nothing of gas and oil and tires."

"We're going to camp out."

"And sleep on the ground?"

"Under the stars," the Tub put in romantically.

"And over a lot of rocks which pierce holes in the small of your back," I added without enthusiasm.

"In God's great out-of-doors," the Tub remarked, in no way discouraged.

"My room at home is much more comfortable."

"The great, virile West, where men are men," the Tub persisted.

"If you'd show me some place where men are tadpoles or ground-hogs, I might be interested in the contrast."

"Ah, but think of it, Grant," Fenwick Dallmoreton Lurb continued raptly. "Out in God's great open spaces, birds trilling in the tree-tops, the soft murmur of mountain streams, the fresh smell of the pines, the low sigh of the night wind, the—"

"Soggy flapjacks after a hard night on a harder ground," I finished.

"Don't pay any attention to the Tub," Johnny cautioned. "He's not responsible. You just listen to me. You crave education, Professor. You're that kind of a misguided mortal. And what man's education can be complete without a knowledge of nature's wonders? We'll see 'em all, Grant. And we'll have our expenses paid in the bargain. It's an opportunity of a lifetime. You can't afford to pass it up."

"But I don't like camping and poor cooking and hard beds and long auto trips and dust and heat and mosquitoes," I objected strenuously. "Now why not be sensible? You two boys go ahead. I appreciate your invitation to go along. I'm really very grateful. But you don't need me. I'd only be in the way. You'd have a much better time without me. I wasn't made for the strenuous life."

The Eel turned decisively toward the door.

"We're leaving in the morning, Grant," he said calmly. "Leave everything to me in the way of outfit and supplies. All you need to bring is a change of underwear." He threw open the door. "Come on, Tub. Let's breeze. Grant'll come, all right. I know him."

"Now listen, Johnny," I pleaded. "Give me a few days to think this thing over."

But Johnny, having pushed the Tub out into the hallway, answered only by slamming the door.

I WILL admit right here that I must be weak-minded. Certainly there is no other explanation for the fact that I found myself on the following morning wedged between Eel and the Tub in the front seat of an automobile which was racing swiftly in the general direction of the Sierra Nevada mountains.

Unused as I was to the wild brand of driving affected by Johnny Holt, it was a long time before I dared draw a deep breath. When at last we were compelled to wait for a freight-train to cross the highway, I glanced about the car and took stock of my surroundings. Escape, I saw at once, was impossible. With Fenwick Dallmoreton Lurb's great bulk barring one door and the Eel barring the other, I knew that any attempt to dive from the car to the comparative safety of the pavement would be promptly frustrated.

The tonneau, I saw, was piled high with a miscellaneous assortment of luggage and camping equipment, heaped in heterogeneous disarray. Strapped on the fenders next to the driver were four boards, quite heavy and some twelve or fourteen feet long. On one side of each board, along both edges, thick strips of wood had been nailed. On the other side, a large number of heavy spikes protruded.

I glanced ahead, saw that the road was still blocked and broached a question.

"What is the idea of the boards?"

Johnny smiled blandly, one hand leaving the wheel and patting the planks.

"The boards, my dear Professor, are to aid the sturdy Belmont over the summit of the Meyers grade."

"Those spikes are apt to be rather tough on tires," I suggested.

"For a Phi Beta Kappa man, you show truly remarkable powers of reasoning," the Eel returned. "The spikes, Professor, will be placed in the snow and will prevent the planks from slipping when the sturdy Belmont runs along them. Those strips of two-by-two on the other side form a sort of a groove and prevent the sturdy Belmont from slipping off said planks."

"I am beginning to comprehend. The machine is to run over the snow on those four planks."

"Exactly, Professor. They will be laid down end to end. The sturdy Belmont will run onto the forward set. Then you and the Tub, working on opposite sides, will carry the rear set and place it up ahead. The maneuver, you understand, may be repeated indefinitely."

"Cheerful prospect—for the Tub and me," I commented.

"Not so bad as you think. There wont be more than ten or twenty miles of snow to travel in that manner," Johnny answered encouragingly. "Say forty hours traveling time. Two days."

"Working twenty hours a day," the Tub groaned.

"It'll do you good," Johnny grinned easily. "And think of the thousand bucks that means three months in God's great out-of-doors, the virile West, where men are men."

"Aw, dry up," the Tub moaned wearily.

AT six o'clock that evening the sturdy Belmont pulled into the town of Placerville. Johnny drew up to the curb and stopped.

"We might as well camp for the night just outside of town," he told the Tub and me. "I'll hop out and buy a couple of steaks for supper."

The Tub pointed a pudgy finger across the street. "That looks like a pretty good restaurant," he suggested hopefully.

"Yes, yes, go on."

"I was thinking we might take on a little fodder here in town. I aint very keen about your cooking."

"And spend four or five dollars when I can get a perfectly good meal for about a dollar and a half?" the Eel came back disgustedly. "Not a hope. You two birds just keep your seats. We got to economize."

DINNER that night was rather a sorry affair to all save Johnny Holt—who, the Tub averred, had been born with a cast-iron stomach which had been case-hardened in maturity by synthetic gin. I admitted without undue urging that the meal was an atrocity, a conglomeration that would have made even a starving Armenian turn up his nose in disgust.

"Aw, gimme a chance," the Eel growled finally. "I have to practice up a little, don't I?"

"Sure. Practice your head off," the fat youth urged. "We wont care, so long as you don't practice on us."

"Then suppose you do the cooking?" Johnny blazed.

"Fair enough! I'll get breakfast. And if it isn't better than this meal you've handed out, I'll be willing to call off the trip and go home. Now where do we sleep—if ever?"

The Eel rose grandly from his camp stool.

"Ah, here's where I show you a little woodcraft. You boys put up the tent and I'll make you a genuine fir-bough bed. And I'll guarantee it will beat any bed you ever slept on. Fir boughs, as you may or may not know, cannot be beaten as mattress material."

I gazed about rather dazedly.

"But there are no fir trees around here!"

The Eel shugged his shoulders imperturbably as he rummaged through the tonneau in search of the ax.

"Oh, a little thing like that never bothers a real woodsman," he grinned, emerging with the ax. "Pine boughs are just as good."

"You mean to say we have to sleep on

a bunch of sharp pine needles?" the Tub gasped.

"Suit yourself. There are plenty of nice soft rocks around, if you care to make your own bed. Take your choice."

Johnny went to work collecting the pine boughs, while the Tub and I strove valiantly to solve the puzzle of the auto tent. Darkness came over the little glade in which we had pitched camp, and we were compelled to finish our task in the glare of the headlights. By the time we rolled into our blankets, on a lumpy bed that was composed primarily of sticks, we had ceased speaking to one another.



Johnny gripped my shoulder and pointed to a gray car.

Breakfast, prepared by the Tub, was somewhat of an improvement over Johnny's dinner—primarily because there was less opportunity for our fat friend to go wrong in the simple frying of three slices of ham and twelve eggs. By two o'clock that afternoon we had reached the snow-line and the sturdy Belmont was plowing ahead through mud and slush.

"Looks better than I'd expected," Johnny declared. "If this keeps up, we wont have more than a few miles to run on the boards. From the looks of this road, there are three or four machines ahead of us. I sure hope nobody has beaten us over the summit."

"That would mean that we'd lose the thousand and would have to turn around and go home, wouldn't it?" I asked eagerly.

"Yes, that's just about what we'd have to do," the Eel admitted.

"Well, here's hoping."

"Hoping what?" Johnny asked suspiciously.

"That some one else wins the honor of driving the first car over the summit."

"Huh!" the Eel grunted, and skidded the car around a curve.

The snow gradually grew deeper, merging onto the road in places. The car would have been in difficulty more than once had not the snow been broken and packed down by the machines ahead. We were climbing fast now. The foothills had given way to a rugged country of jagged peaks and ridges, swept bare of snow by the wind; of swift streams, swollen and muddy, roaring down the cañon beside the road.

"Ah," the Tub sighed happily, "this is the real McCoy."

Johnny suddenly slowed the car and pointed to the road ahead. A quarter of a mile farther on we saw three automobiles, parked single file in the road. Ahead of the cars was a crew of men, burrowing into a snowbank that looked to be eight or ten feet deep.

"Here's where we stop and reconnoiter," the Eel decided. He brought the car to a halt in the center of the road, the snow being too deep on either side to pull off the highway. "Tub, suppose you go up and look around. Find out what cars those are and what chance they've got of digging their way through. We're about three miles from the summit, so I don't think we need to worry much. We should be able to take it easy and get a good night's sleep before we start over the top."

The Tub departed. The Eel and I never

knew how long he was gone, for we were sound asleep in the car when he returned. He roused us with a war-whoop which awoke the echoes.

"Well, how does she look?" Johnny asked, pawing at his eyes.

"She's a knockout, if you ask me," the fat youth burst out enthusiastically. "Say! You never saw such eyes in your life. And a form that's got the Venus de Milo looking like a spavined washerwoman! And lips! Say, I'd give my share of the thousand right now—"

"Listen, dumb-bell!" Johnny cut in tersely. "Come down to earth. I sent you ahead to look over those cars and the road. And here you come back raving about Venuses. What's got into you? Has the light air gone to your head?"

"But I tell you she's a queen. She's one of the sweetest looking little mammas I ever put my lamps on. Red-headed, too!"

"Who?"

"A dame up there in one of those cars."

JOHNNY groaned. "Tub, I'd ought to split your block head open with a boulder, just to see if there's anything inside of it. Now get your feet back on the ground and tell us how the road looks ahead."

"Looks! You can't see it. It's covered with snow."

"How deep does the snow appear to be?"

"How deep? Oh, deep enough to keep those men working for a week before they break through."

"Good. What are the machines?"

"The first one's a Speedwell. That's the one with the girl in it. She's with her dad and her two brothers. They're on their way to New York and thought the road was open."

"And the other cars?"

"They're both factory cars. Five men with each one. They're trying to beat each other over the summit. The whole gang is working like blazes. As soon as they get to the top of the grade, they'll probably try to make a dash for it. They say the snow isn't as deep on the other side. They're all working together now, though. But say, that little girl in the Speedwell—"

Johnny turned to me with a broad grin, while Fenwick Dallmoreton Lurb resumed his enumeration of the charms of the young lady in the Speedwell.

"It looks pretty sweet for us," the Eel commented. "I'd say we were a cinch for that thousand."

I nodded woefully; my cherished hope had gone glimmering. Faced by three months of life in the great untrammeled West, I didn't care much whether school kept or not.

"Guess we might as well camp for the night," the Eel went on, heedless alike of my dejection and the fat youth's peroration. "There's a little spot over there at the side of the road where the snow has melted. We can pitch camp there, cook up a fine dinner and get a good night's sleep. Tomorrow will be a hard day."

"And tonight will probably be a hard night," I added, feeling quite disconsolate, "unless you've learned that three-inch pine branches will never put the mattress manufacturers out of business. Guess I'll cook dinner. I can't do any worse than you did last night."

"Thank heaven!" the Tub put in, coming to life.

"Thank heaven for what?" Johnny asked angrily.

"That I'm invited out to dinner tonight."

"Invited out to dinner! Where? How come?"

"Oh, the sweet mamma up the line asked me to partake of the evening meal with her and her folks," Fenwick Dallmoreton Lurb answered airily.

"Fast worker, aren't you?" Johnny sneered.

"Sure am," the fat youth admitted with unbecoming immodesty. "At least, that's what the girls all tell me."

The Eel's answer was a derisive grunt.

"I was telling her about that alleged meal you wished on us last night," the Tub went on. "She just about laughed her sides out. Anyway, she asked me to dinner. Took pity on me, I guess."

"Huh! I don't blame her for taking pity on you," Johnny came back. "And I don't mean what you mean, either."

"Aw, you're just jealous 'cause you weren't invited."

"Well, I guess I'll manage to get along. And one thing more, you fat sheik! If you want Papa to bruise you, just let out to those people up ahead what we're here for. Understand?"

"Huh! What do you take me for?"

"A dub, of course."

"Well, maybe I am. But I had sense enough to tell them that we were just three innocent college boys trying to get along.

They don't even suspect that we're up here to beat them over the summit."

"Well, keep that up and we'll be all right. But if they begin to get suspicious, they're liable to pitch in and work all night shoveling snow. And you know what that would mean, don't you?"

"What?" the Tub asked nervously.

"It would mean that we'd have to work all night, too."

"Then rest in peace. They'll never find out from me why we're here. Not by no means."

IT was just six o'clock the following morning when, camp broken and the duffle packed, the Eel unstrapped the planks from the side of the car and laid them out.

"We'll leave the road and get up on the snow right here," he decided. "By cutting across the hillside and working over there to the south, we can miss the gang ahead and save maybe a mile in the bargain."

"But they're sure to hear the motor and know what we're up to," I remarked.

"Let 'em. By that time it'll be too late. They can't shovel snow or buck through it half as fast as we can travel on those boards. Once we get under way, there'll be no stopping us. We ought to make the summit by noon. And three o'clock this afternoon ought to see us down in the valley on the other side. Let's go."

Inclining the planks from the road to the snow-bank, we worked the car off the highway and onto the higher ground at one side. From then on it was work, unadulterated, back-breaking toil. Sloshing back and forth in the snow, the Tub and I labored feverishly carrying the planks forward. The progress of the car, while far slower than Johnny had anticipated, was ridiculously easy. The cleats which ran along the edges of the upper sides of the planks kept the car from skidding sidewise; the heavy spikes held the boards firmly in the snow.

At first we caught occasional glimpses through the trees of the other machines, of glistening shovels and the flash of snow as our competitors labored in clearing the road. Then the sturdy Belmont, at the expense of much cursing and perspiring labor, forged ahead of them and out of sight.

At noon the Tub and I collapsed wearily on the snow and demanded lunch, which the Eel obligingly called forth out of several cans and a box of crackers. After an hour's rest, we were preparing to return to our task when we observed two figures striding slowly toward us through the snow. The Tub rose hurriedly to his feet, his fat chest expanding.

"Ah, here comes Miss Carson and her dad," he remarked grandly. "Hiked all the way over here to see me. Well, I guess I'll take the afternoon off. My little red-headed mamma—"

"Your little red-headed mamma will see you indulging in hard labor if she stays here five minutes," Johnny interrupted. "And as for taking the afternoon off, or any part of it, just you try to make a sneak and see what happens to you. Just try it, that's all."

"Aw, pipe down, pipe down!" the Tub urged in a frantic whisper. "Want 'em to hear you makin' a fool out of yourself? Act your age, you big ape."

Miss Carson and her father drew up to the car. The young lady was all and more than the Tub had claimed. She was charming in her trim riding habit and high boots. Further, she showed immediately that she had no eye for anyone save Fenwick Dallmoreton Lurb. The latter, assuming his most gracious manner, introduced the visitors to the Eel and me.

"Quite an outfit you boys have here," the elder Carson smiled, gazing at the car and the string of planks. "Quite ingenious, I must say. Who thought of it, may I ask?"

"It was my idea," the Tub answered modestly.

"And a brilliant one, too," Miss Carson put in, her great blue eyes never leaving the flushed, eager face of the fat youth. Johnny suppressed a scowl.

"Well, I wish we'd thought of something like that," Carson went on. "We might not have to suffer all this delay. Oh, well, we're having a good time and enjoying the outing."

"Yes, indeed, we're having a perfectly wonderful time," Miss Carson agreed. "Isn't the air lovely up here?"

"Great!" the Tub seconded swiftly, before either of us had time to get in a word.

"And the snow and the green trees!"

"Superb!"

"And all these trilling brooks!"

"Marvelous!"

"And these glorious mountains!"

The Tub hesitated an instant, evidently trying to call forth another adjective.

Johnny saw his chance and leaped into the conversation.

"Well, guess it's time we were getting back on the job. Come on, *Tub!* Grab the plank on your side."

Mr. Lurb staggered a little, his face growing red.

"Tub!" the beautiful Miss Carson exclaimed. "Is that what you call him?"

"Sure," Johnny answered gruffly. "That's his nickname. Doesn't it fit him?"

"What a perfectly terrible nickname!" Miss Carson decreed, edging back from the Eel. If she had had on skirts she would have drawn them back slightly, I reflected.

"Come on, *Tub!*" Johnny commanded, climbing into the car.

THE fat youth, very red now, gazed appealingly at the Eel; then, seeing no sign of relenting on Johnny's grim countenance, he shrugged his ponderous shoulders and grinned in rather a sickly fashion.

"Well, I got to humor the lad," he remarked easily. "Otherwise he might get mad and lay down on the job. He has to drive the car, you know."

"Yes, of course," Miss Carson agreed, casting a scornful glance at Johnny. "We wont take any more of your time. We just dropped over to ask you to come to dinner again tonight. One of the men with the Dalmon killed some quail this morning. And we're going to have quail on toast for dinner. You'll come, of course."

"Will I?" the Tub beamed; then, more grandly: "I shall be delighted, Miss Carson."

"Sorry we can't ask all of you," the girl's father put in. "But there's not enough to go around."

"Perfectly all right," Johnny returned. His voice was coolly bland, but there was a hard glitter in his brown eyes. "Now let's get to work, Tub."

The Tub grasped his plank reluctantly, and the sturdy Belmont again got under way. The two visitors had disappeared among the trees before anyone spoke. Then Johnny remarked casually:

"Pretty tough on you, Tub."

"Why? What?" Mr. Lurb puffed, tugging at one of the planks.

"You wont be able to get any of that *quail on toast.*" The last words were uttered with unusual venom.

The Tub raised up swiftly. I smiled to myself at the consternation in his eyes.

"Huh? Why not?"

"Because you got to stick around camp. I miscalculated the speed we're making. At any rate, we wont make the valley tonight. We'll barely get over the summit."

"Well, maybe you'll be kind enough to tell me what that has to do with quail on toast," the Tub demanded sarcastically.

"It's got just this to do with it. All three of us have got to stick in camp and guard the car. Now that those birds have a hunch what we're up to, there's no telling what they'll try to do. There's liable to be dirty work afoot tonight."

"Get out!" the fat youth scoffed.

"No foolin'. We got to stick together. No runnin' off and chasing around with red-headed mammas. Besides, anybody that would take a second look at that dumb Dora ought to have his head examined."

"What! What's that?" the Tub blazed.

"You heard me. The dame is a moron. Nobody but a moron would rave about trilling brooks and glorious mountains."

"She has an appreciation for the beauties of Nature," the Tub declared stanchly.

"She hands out a lot of apple-sauce, if that's what you mean. Pure mush."

"Gush," I put in, grinning.

"Slush," Johnny added, not grinning.

"Aw, you birds gimme a pain," the Tub growled disgustedly. "And if you think you're going to cheat me out of that quail on toast, you got another think coming."

"Have I? What'd your father tell me before we left home? Answer me that, young feller. Ashamed to answer, huh? Well, he told me that if you weren't a good boy and didn't mind me, I was to put you on the train and ship you home—via freight collect." Johnny paused. "Now laugh that one off."

But the Tub was in no laughing mood at that particular moment. Nor, as the afternoon progressed, did he show any inclination toward laughter. I didn't feel much like laughing, either. That afternoon was sheer work.

At three o'clock the sturdy Belmont reached the summit of the Meyers grade and started down the other side toward the valley. All of us heaved a sigh of relief. Now, at least, we would not be compelled to carry the planks uphill. As night gathered, Johnny saw that we would never make the foot of the grade before dark, and he reluctantly called a halt.

And Fenwick Dallmoreton Lurb ate canned beans and crackers that night. As

I had learned long ago, often to my sorrow, Johnny Holt's will was very strong.

"We'll have to stand guard over the car and the planks," the Eel announced as we gathered around our camp-fire after the evening repast. "As I said before, there's liable to be dirty work afoot tonight. That fellow Carson looked suspicious to me. I've seen his face somewhere before. Can't quite place him. But I know I've seen him. Maybe it was that time I went through San Quentin. I dunno.

"Anyway, we got to stand watches. The Tub will take the first one—eight till midnight. I'll go on from midnight to three, and Grant can take the rest of the night. And there's to be no monkey business, understand, Tub? If that gang does anything to the car or to those planks, we're through. That's all. So see that you don't go to sleep on watch, Tub. Keep my rifle in your hand all the time, and if anybody comes around the car, pour some lead into 'em and then ask what they want. Get me?"

"Uh-huh," the Tub answered disconsolately. From long acquaintance with the fat youth I knew that he was heartbroken over the quail on toast. "Don't worry about me. I'll keep awake."

Darkness settled down over the camp, and the Tub settled down over the campfire. Johnny and I turned in, fully dressed, under a huge pile of blankets and coats and sweaters. We slept soundly, worn out by the day's exertions.

Daylight was showing through the walls of the tent when we were awakened by a great bellow. Johnny and I rolled over and looked at each other. Something was wrong. We both knew that, for the Tub had failed to waken us to stand our watches.

"Hey, Johnny! Hey, Grant! Come out here. What the devil has happened?" This in the Tub's anxious tones.

The Eel thrust back the blankets and



The car headed down the slope, out of control. And Johnny was in that hurtling juggernaut!

leaped out of the tent. I followed him as quickly as I could.

"A fine kind of a watchman you are, Johnny," the Tub began angrily. "I thought you looked mighty sleepy when I called you to go on watch at midnight. You probably never woke up at all. And now look what's happened. The planks have been stolen."

The Eel took one glance at the machine and then centered his gaze on Fenwick Dallmoreton Lurb. The fat youth made an excellent pretense of righteous indignation, shaking his fist angrily, cursing, calling down the wrath of the gods on a man who couldn't be depended upon to wake up when he was called to go on watch. But to me, watching him steadily, it was all too plainly a pretense.

Johnny endured the harangue in silence for a time. Then he strode forward and grasped the Tub by the scruff of the neck, shook him, lifted him off his feet and threw him into a snowdrift.

"Tub, your little stall doesn't get over. You never called me last night. Something happened. Now come clean and tell us the whole story."

THE TUB debated an instant. Then, seeing Johnny's scrawny hand reaching toward his neck again, he burst out:

"All right, all right. I'll tell you. Only keep those fingers off my neck. Want to choke a man to death?"

"I'd love to," Johnny snarled feelingly. "Now tell us what happened."

"Well, I was standing my watch nice as you please," the Tub declared, "when along about nine o'clock Miss Carson comes over. She was kind o' sore because I hadn't come to supper and hadn't sent any word. Fact is, she was all put out about it. Well, I pacified her as best I could, but nothin' would do but that I come over to their camp and eat a couple o' quail she'd saved for me. So,"—Mr. Lurb's eyes fell,—"I went."

"And while you were gone, those bozos came over here and stole our planks," Johnny put in angrily.

The Tub nodded. "Yeh. I hadn't been gone ten minutes before I got suspicious. I came running back. I found twelve men in the act of stealing our planks. Well, you know me, Johnny. I pitched into 'em. And say! What I didn't do to that gang! Why, I had the whole twelve of 'em just about cleaned up. Then I got hit in the head with one of the planks and fell down unconscious on the snow. How long I lay there—"

"That's a lot of apple-sauce," Johnny interrupted the narrative at this point. "Before you pitch into twelve men, or two men, they'd have to be handcuffed and leg-ironed. I know just about what happened. As soon as we were asleep, you sneaked off to sheik that red-headed moron. When you came back, the planks were gone and you were too scared to wake us up and tell us about it. Oh, I know you, you fat dub!

"Incidentally, it has just come into my mind who this bird Carson is. He's the chap that drives the Speedwell on all these record-breaking runs. Holds the Los Angeles-Salt Lake record. And the Los Angeles-Phoenix record. I've seen his picture in the papers a dozen times. And now I suppose I'll see it once more. The other two cars haven't got a chance against him, once he really gets going and starts bucking through the snow in earnest. He's just playing with 'em now. He'll probably cut loose th' morning. That old wagon of his will break through this snow like it was tissue paper."

"But the girl!" the Tub objected. "What's she doing on a trip like this?"

"Better ask her. Surely you don't expect me to analyze the whims of a red-headed flapper!" The Eel gazed forlornly at the car. "Now how in the name of common sense are we going to get out of here? In an hour or two the sun will thaw out this crust of ice and the old boat will sink in the snow. And if I'm any judge, it's about ten feet deep right here where she's standing. And once she sinks in, it'll take us a month to dig her out."

"Maybe you better try to drive her back on the road," the Tub suggested hopefully.

"Road!" Johnny grunted. "If you can see any road around here, I'll admit I need glasses. It's covered with snow. The only thing we can do is to wait till that Speedwell breaks through and opens up the road. Then I'll try to ease her over onto the highway, and I'll be lucky if I don't slide down the mountain. You, Tub, get the chains out and put 'em on. And one more yelp out of you, and I'll brain you."

Johnny dropped onto the running-board and buried his head in his hands. The Tub set to work to put on the skid chains. I started to get breakfast and pack up.

"A thousand bucks!" the Eel moaned. "Think of it! A thousand bucks shot to the dickens all because of a rattle-brained, girl-struck dub! It's terrible—terrible!"

An hour later Johnny gripped my shoulder fiercely and pointed to a great gray touring car bucking through the snow along the road, a hundred yards away. The Tub, hat in hand, was evidently seizing this chance to bid farewell to his little red-headed mamma.

The big machine was making fair progress; in an hour more, two at the most, it would be at the bottom of the grade. As completely dejected as I have ever seen him, Johnny watched it grind slowly past. A girl in the tonneau, a red-haired girl, waved to him. The Eel cursed brokenly, got to his feet and climbed into his car.

"I'll try to get back on the road now,"

he said dispiritedly. "You boys better walk. I may not make it. If the car starts to slide, it'll be curtains. And there's no use sacrificing all three of us."

VISIONS of a wrecked car and the Eel's broken body came before my eyes.

"Johnny, you better not try it," I pleaded. "You better not take the chance."

"Shut up!" came hoarsely from the Eel. "I can't leave the car here until summer, can I?" He stepped on the starter; the motor hummed after a moment; the Tub and I jumped to one side. Johnny waved his hand.

"Well, so long, boys. If I don't—"

At this point the car began to move, not forward, as the Eel had intended, but sidewise down the mountain. Johnny, suddenly very white, jerked on the emergency-brake. The car swung around slowly, its rear wheels locked, and then headed down the slope. It gained momentum swiftly; in another second it was quite out of control.

I closed my eyes and groaned. It was a thousand feet to the floor of the valley. There were trees in the way, boulders, banks of drifted snow. And Johnny Holt was in that hurtling juggernaut!

"Come on!" I heard the Tub shout.

Fearfully, hopelessly, we started in pursuit of the sliding automobile, which, like a great bob-sled, was bounding down the slope. It had slid off the crown of the hill now and was racing down the steep ravine, leaving behind it a cloud of flying snow and severed underbrush. The ravine curved slightly. The car disappeared. Only two deep tracks in the snow showed the course of its swift flight.

The Tub and I ran on down the hill, stumbling, sliding, gaining our feet, falling, sliding again. Halfway down the mountain we stumbled over the body of Johnny Holt. Half buried in the snow, cursing softly but fluently, we found the Eel—tenderly rubbing his left leg.

"Barked my shin when I jumped over the door!" he told us, climbing to his feet.

The Tub threw his arms about the tall form of our friend.

"Johnny! We thought you were killed!"

"Aw, dry up! And get away from me. Save that lovey-dovey stuff for your red-haired mammas. Let's get down the hill and pick up the pieces. Thank the Lord the old man had the car insured. Otherwise I'd be ruined. Let's go."

The three of us raced on down the hill. Johnny's long legs carried him ahead of the Tub and me, and he was soon lost to sight around a turn in the cañon. When we next saw him he was on the flat, level floor of the valley, leaning weakly against a tree, rubbing trembling hands across his forehead. We ran to him anxiously.

"What's the matter, Johnny?" I panted. "Heart go back on you? Altitude too high?"

"No," the Eel murmured. "It's my eyes. Look! Do you see what I see?"

I followed his pointing arm. And there, leaning nonchalantly against a tree, apparently not fatally injured, was the sturdy Belmont. Its top, to be sure, had been left somewhere up the mountain. Two fenders were hanging by the merest threads of metal. But the wheels, the body, the radiator, the running gear were still intact. And the motor was idling merrily.

The Eel stumbled forward again.

"Kept to the cañon," he murmured dazedly. "No trees. Stayed right side up all the way. Rear wheels locked. Kept her from broaching sideways and rolling over. Who'd have thought it? Sitting pretty. A thousand bucks. A thousand bucks! And three months in the wild and untrammeled West! Hot damn!"

A closer inspection failed to reveal any further damage to the automobile than the ruined top and fenders. Quite recovered from his wild ride and his wilder leap from the flying car, the Eel sat down on the running-board, wiped the perspiration from his forehead, drew out a pencil and a slip of paper and began to write. He glanced up after a time, listening. From somewhere up the side of the mountain above us came the deep roar of the Speedwell's exhaust, as the heavy car bucked its way through the snow. The Eel grinned elatedly and handed the slip of paper to me.

"Telegram to the Belmont agency in San Francisco," he explained laconically.

I read it slowly, with a sinking heart, knowing that it sentenced me to three months of misery in the great open spaces:

> In heroic struggle through snow and ice over impassable roads, sturdy Belmont driven by John Holt battled its way over Meyers grade, first car of season to reach Lake Tahoe Valley.

Johnny rose, grinning broadly.

"The nearest town is Meyers, a mile or two away. Likewise the nearest hotel. Let's buy ourselves a square meal."



Lu Chan and the Tongs

Here is another of this author's vivid and authentic tales of San Francisco's subterranean Chinatown.

By LEMUEL DE BRA

LU CHAN bent over the dying man. "I have come, Bow Sheong," she said in quiet Cantonese. "And I am sorry."

For about as long as it takes to recite "The Last Prayer of the Dying," Bow Sheong looked up at the woman's pale face and tired eyes.

"So!" His deep voice rumbled brokenly. "You—you say you are sorry! Well, when you hear what I have to tell you, then—then you will be glad that I am dying!"

Lu Chan drew back, startled. *"Aih-yah!* How can you say such a wicked thing?"

The old *tong* killer did not answer. From a teak stool at the head of his couch he took a bowl of *Mui Kwei Lo* and drank long and deeply of the fiery liquor.

"For almost three months," said Bow Sheong, "I have been a prisoner in this bed. I have talked with no one but that empty-headed Doctor Moo. So tell me, Lu Chan: what news do you hear from your son, Ah Toy?"

"I hear nothing, Bow Sheong!" declared the woman angrily. "And let me tell you before you speak your thoughts, that I do not want your money—I want my boy! It is true that when he was with me I was starving; but it was only hunger of the stomach. Now, when I have plenty of rice and flour, I cannot eat; for now it is my heart that is starving. I do not know whether the foreign-devil officials will not let him write to his mother, or if he has been too busy since they took him to pris-

on. I am only a woman, and I know nothing about such things."

"That is true, of course; but the gossip—the gossip of the shops—"

"Haie! Surely, Bow Sheong, you must know that since my boy confessed to slaying an old man for his money, I have walked my way with eyes that are only for the shedding of tears, with ears that listen only for his step in the hall, and with lips that move only in prayer. So I have talked only with Fong Wo Chee, the kind-hearted priest at the Temple of the Seven Gods. He tells me that—that it is all for the best, that I must forget. Forget? How can I forget when my heart cries with every breath: *'Ah Toy! Ah Toy!'"*

The old killer stirred uneasily. *"Hi low!* That is true! And that is one reason why I sent for you. I am going to tell you how you can have Ah Toy set free. I—"

WITH a sharp intake of breath, Lu Chan bent forward, her hands pressing against her leaping heart. She started to speak, but Bow Sheong interrupted angrily. For a moment then, there was silence. Lu Chan, trembling, sat with closed eyes. Bow Sheong stared dreamily at the window as though listening to the early morning noises in the Chinatown alley below.

"Now be still, old woman," Bow Sheong said presently, "and let me talk. For many years, as you know, I have been a gunman for the Hoy Sin Wah *tong*. I have slain many men. I have been very clever. I was never caught. Only once did I see the terrible net of the foreign-devil police closing about me. That was when the great *tong* war broke out in New York City. Our *tong* received wire-talk to go out and kill. They sent for me at once. And that night—I killed Ng Gar Lo."

"Ng Gar Lo!" breathed the woman incredulously. "But—but they said—"

"That your son Ah Toy did it. And he confessed. Certainly! That was how I escaped. Our spies warned us that the foreign-devil police were watching me, that they were asking many questions, and that they were weaving a steel net from which I could not escape. Well, I did escape. But I did it by having our *tong* pay your son to take my place in the net."

Lu Chan's mouth opened—and shut. There was a bewildered look in her eyes.

"That night," went on Bow Sheong, "we smoked long over the matter at the meeting-rooms of our *tong*. Everyone said it would be a bitter disgrace if I had to go to prison; but everyone said also that there was only one way to save me. The foreign-devil officials were very angry over the *tong* outbreak, and there had been much paper-talk.

"So, since some one had to go to prison, we decided to hire a man to take my place. I, myself, suggested your son. You know Ah Toy has never been worth anything since he came back from the big war. He—"

"Was that his fault?" Lu Chan broke in, the waters of sorrow springing suddenly to her eyes. "He was a bright boy until they took him away across the sea. They kept him almost two years, and they said I should be very proud of it, but what it was all about I could never understand. I know only that when he came back his eyes were like the eyes of a dead fish and he could do nothing but sit and stare out the window. Do you—"

"Hold your tongue!" growled Bow Sheong. "I sent for you to tell you something, not to hear your chatter! As I was saying, Ah Toy has been of no use to you, nor to himself, since he came back from the war. He could not work, and you were not strong enough for both. So I sent for Ah Toy.

"Ah Toy was slow to understand what we wanted; but once he understood, he was very sensible. He agreed to our plan. Also, he saw the wisdom of not telling you anything about it.

"So your son, who is innocent, went to prison that you might have the food and clothing you need. The money that the *tong* has paid you every month, and which you thought was charity, was earned by Ah Toy when he took my place in the net. Now do you understand?"

Lu Chan's sloe-black eyes were gleaming with tears. She nodded slowly.

"I understand, Bow Sheong. But how can I make them free Ah Toy? I am a woman; they will pay no attention to me."

"I was coming to that. Yesterday the doctor told me I have less than a month to live. That terrible disease that so many of our men get from eating hot rice and drinking scalding hot tea, is gnawing at my vitals. I may live a month; I may not live to see another sun. And I, Bow Sheong, the cleverest killer of all the *tongs*, who evaded death many times, can hire no one to take my place now.

"So, since I must die, why should my *tong* keep paying that money? And why should Ah Toy remain in prison? Let the foreign-devil officials come and hear the truth. Let them free Ah Toy and take me to their prison—what does it matter to a dying man?"

Lu Chan jumped up. "What shall I do?" she cried in a choking voice. "Tell me quickly!"

"Go at once to the meeting-rooms of the *tong* and fetch old Moy Ong, the writer of letters. I shall explain to him exactly what we wish to do, and he can put everything in writing. Then some one can fetch the foreign-devil officials and I will swear to the writing before them."

Unsteadily, Lu Chan hastened to the door. She turned. "May the Mother of Heaven bless you!" she breathed fervently, and fled down the hall.

At the outer door of the rooms of the Hoy Sin Wah *tong* a flat-nosed Chinese with sullen eyes stopped Lu Chan.

"What do you want, old woman?"

"I want to speak with Moy Ong, the writer of letters."

"He is not here."

Lu Chan's heart sank as she saw the *tong* man start to close the door. "Bow Sheong sent me!" she cried quickly. "It is about Ah Toy and it is very important!"

"But Moy Ong is not here, I told you. It is too early. Come back in an hour."

"I shall wait. Perhaps—"

"You cannot wait here, old woman! Come back in an hour!"

"Please—"

But the *tong* man closed the door.

In the street outside the *tong* headquarters, Lu Chan stood where she could watch the stairway. One hour—in one hour, perhaps sooner, she would see Moy Ong and they would start at once to set Ah Toy free. And Ah Toy knew nothing about it. How happy he would be if he knew!

Lu Chan looked down the street. She could see, beyond Portsmouth Square, the cold gray stone front of the Hall of Justice. That was where they took Ah Toy that terrible day—Lu Chan could never forget that. He was not there now. Many months ago they had taken him to the big prison across the bay; but she could never forget that room where big men with loud voices and rough hands shouted many questions in Ah Toy's frightened face.

But there was one man in that room who had spoken kindly to Lu Chan and had offered her a chair. He was a pale man with white hair and he seemed to be in charge of all the others. Perhaps he could send word to Ah Toy that he was soon to be set free!

LU CHAN turned down the street—then stopped. It would take no more than fifteen minutes to go to the police station and get back; but in that time Moy Ong might come and go away again.

The woman was about to go back when she saw, a half-block down the street, the sugar-cane stand of Gee Hop. Gee Hop was puttering around the stand, arranging his cane for the day's business. Lu Chan glanced back up the street to make sure that Moy Ong was not coming, then hurried down the walk.

"Good morning, Gee Hop! Will you trust me for a sack of sugar-cane? I have no money with me."

Gee Hop stared at her as though he saw a ghost.

"It—it is for Ah Toy," explained Lu Chan quickly. "We are going to set him free today. Aren't you glad? You always liked Ah Toy even when he was just a baby and used to steal your sugar-cane."

Suddenly Gee Hop jumped. He filled a sack with his best pieces, pressed it into the woman's hand, then turned away quickly and pretended to be very busy.

"Many thanks," murmured Lu Chan. "By the way, have you seen Moy Ong, the writer of letters, this morning?"

Gee Hop did not look around, but he waved a bony hand.

"I saw him talking to Nam Jon, the dealer in drugs, not five minutes ago. If you hurry—"

Lu Chan did not wait to hear the rest. Nam Jon's place was just around the corner. She hurried on to the druggist's.

"*Hoo la ma*, Nam Jon!" cried Lu Chan. "Is Moy Ong, the writer of letters, here? We are going to get Ah Toy out of prison this morning and Moy Ong must help me."

For a time Nam Jon stared at the woman; then he clicked his tongue, and putting the cap back on a jar of dried lizards, he set the jar back on the shelf. "He is not here." Nam Jon spoke without looking at the woman. "But I saw him not five minutes ago talking with Loy Jing, the worker in gold and jade."

Lu Chan started on, then hesitated. Loy Jing's store was two blocks distant. What if Moy Ong should go to the *tong* head-

quarters while she was seeking him on the streets? But perhaps he was doing some writing that would take him all morning!

Lu Chan went back to the corner and looked up and down the street. There was no one in front of the *tong* rooms. Moy Ong was nowhere in sight. But still Lu Chan hesitated; and finally, when she resolved to hasten to Loy Jing's, she noticed that almost half of the hour had passed.

She found Loy Jing sitting at his desk, scolding his clerks because there were no customers, and polishing his gold-rimmed glasses.

"*Hoo la ma,* Loy Jing!" cried Lu Chan. "I have good news for you! We are going to get Ah Toy out of prison this morning. Is Moy Ong, the writer of letters, here? I must find Moy Ong quickly."

Loy Jing's slender hand paused, the green silk handkerchief almost slipping from his fingers. In a dead silence, he stared at the woman.

"Did you hear me?" demanded Lu Chan sharply. "I asked for—"

"Yes, yes!" broke in Loy Jing and put on his glasses hurriedly. "Moy Ong? Let me think! Yes, I saw him talking with Lai Wo Dart, the pawnbroker, not five minutes ago. If you hurry—"

The store of Lai Wo Dart was in an alley a block and a half from the headquarters of the Hoy Sin Wah *tong*. "I will go there," said Lu Chan, "and if I do not find Moy Ong I will hurry on to the *tong* rooms and ask for him again."

Lai Wo Dart was arguing with a round-headed youth who wanted to borrow ten dollars on an ivory elephant worth only five dollars. Almost ten minutes passed before Lu Chan got a chance to speak.

"Good morning, Lai Wo Dart!" exclaimed Lu Chan. "You know my boy, Ah Toy? We are going to get him out of prison today. *Haie!* He may be home in time for evening rice! But I must find Moy Ong, the writer of letters! Is he here?"

Through his huge shell-rimmed glasses the pawnbroker stared at Lu Chan; then suddenly he snatched up the ivory elephant and began cleaning it with a piece of jeweler's cloth. "He has not been here, old woman," Lai Wo Dart said, without looking up. "Why don't you ask for him at the *tong* rooms?"

"I will do that," said Lu Chan and hurried away.

The door of the *tong* rooms was a massive affair of solid oak. When no one came to answer the bell, Lu Chan pounded on the door panel; and when that brought no response, she ventured to try the knob. The door was locked.

For twenty minutes Lu Chan waited in the stairway, but no one came.

"What shall I do?" Lu Chan cried to herself. "What shall I do? If I go to seek Moy Ong he may come. If I wait here, he may spend the whole day elsewhere. And Ah Toy—"

On sudden impulse, Lu Chan started down the street. As she passed the Celestial Glory Jewelry Store she noticed that she had waited for Moy Ong much longer than an hour.

There were quite a few people in the hall outside the office of the captain of detectives but they paid no attention to the Chinese woman. Opening the door, Lu Chan was glad to find the pale-faced man alone at his desk.

She mustered her best English.

"I—you savvy Ah Toy?"

The Captain looked at Lu Chan a moment, then said kindly: "Do you mean the young chap who went over for murder?"

That was too much for Lu Chan. At the look of blank helplessness on her face, the Captain reached for his desk-phone. Ten seconds later Yick Fang, the dapper, sharp-faced Chinese interpreter, glided in. "Find out what this woman wants," ordered the Captain, and turned to his desk.

"Oh, hello, Lu Chan!" exclaimed the interpreter as he turned to the woman. "What are you doing here this morning?"

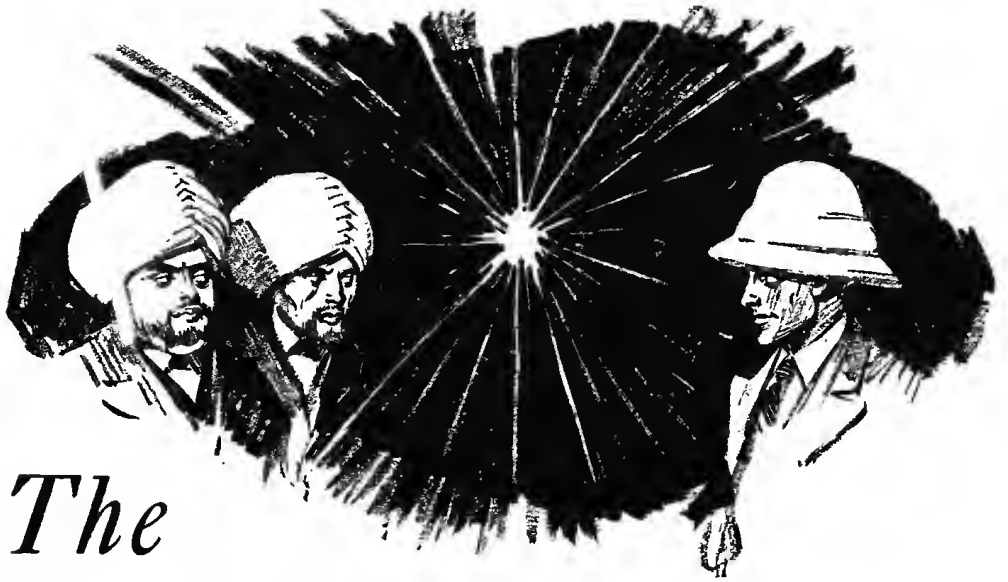
Lu Chan, with a sigh of infinite relief, launched into her story.

"CAPTAIN," said Yick Fang later, as he got out a cigarette and with his thumbnail struck a match alight, "I knew just what you would say to the old woman, so I said it—I told her we would do everything we could to help her—and sent her on her way. The Chinese colony has kept her in ignorance all this time, which makes the situation all the more amusing."

The Captain looked up over his shoulder. "What the devil are you talking about?" he demanded.

Yick Fang chuckled.

"Bow Sheong, the *tong* killer, has made a confession that would free the old woman's son, Ah Toy. But Ah Toy, as you know, was hanged at San Quentin about an hour ago."



The Black Star of Narrapore

This latest of Mr. Orcutt's well-liked "Tales of the Merchant Marine" will hold you interested to the last sentence.

By STEPHEN HOPKINS ORCUTT

Illustrated by Frank Hoban

IT was at tea one afternoon in the drawing-room of the Governor's wife at Delhi that a little group of four men—His Excellency among them—reached a decision in regard to a certain commission for the Government. Then the group broke up, Major Carstairs of the Staff being asked to submit the matter to Lady Follansbee at once, and see if she cared to undertake it. He crossed to where she was sitting with some other ladies, just inside one of the terrace windows—and when the other women left them tête-à-tête, broached the subject to her.

"We've considered three or four men for this mission, Lady Follansbee—but there is obviously more risk in a man's undertaking it than a woman, particularly if he were known to be in any way associated with the Indian Government. Finally some one mentioned to His Excellency that you were leaving almost immediately for a year's stay at home—visiting your children, he tells me, who are at school in England, and recuperating from this beastly climate. The fact that you've previously helped us out upon occasion, in a few instances, would appear to suggest you as the ideal person to carry this out if you can do so without inconveniencing yourself."

"The inconvenience is not so much, Major—though I presume you would wish to alter my traveling arrangements somewhat. I'm booked on the P. & O. from Bombay, you know. But there is certainly more or less personal risk about anything of this sort—"

"But—how could anybody suspect you? It is generally understood that some one of the Secret Service will handle it!"

"Oh—how does anyone suspect things in the Orient? The atmosphere is saturated with intrigue! Then—again—suppose you insist upon my shifting to some other boat? That sets tongues wagging. It is commented upon in the bazaars—who knows by how many!"

"There's a simple explanation for that

—one which should satisfy even the most suspicious ones. Your physician considers that a longer time at sea, going home, will be much more beneficial for you—say, one of the half-and-half boats—a new cargo-boat with fine but very limited passenger accommodation and not over fifteen knots at the most. He thinks the social gayety, the incessant activity on a P. & O. liner, too much of a strain on your nerves when what you most need is all the rest and quiet you can get. Eh?"

"As far as that goes, I'm feeling really quite fit—considering this climate; my *ayahs* and all the rest of them know it, too. Still—one might be upon the verge of a break-down, of course. But you're asking me to accept a heavy responsibility—"

"For which I fancy Governm'nt will stand most liberal compensation, if you consent to undertake it. I fancy you magnify the risk a great deal—because the master of the steamer will have private Governm'nt orders to look after you carefully—though he'll not know why. An' two of the Secret Service will be in touch until you're on board."

"That would be a mistake! No matter how well disguised, some of the Hindus might suspect their identity; then, if they seem to be following me, I'm either being shadowed for some crime—or else entrusted by the Government with some commission which renders guarding me advisable. No, I'd best go down from here on my own, as if nobody had any interest in my movements. Had you any particular boat in mind?"

"Until you asked—no. But one just occurs to me as being what you might pick out from a news-sheet interest in her, because of the ship's recent adventures—book passage to be entertained on the home voyage by the officers' description of what happened."

"Oh-h-h—you mean the *Argentine Liberator*—one of Sir Jason Brock's boats? Why—I fancy it might be an int'resting trip on such a boat! Aye! But I couldn't possibly make Singapore in time to catch her—she'll be leaving there in two or three days. Which means I'd have to go ashore at Aden and wait for her. That, I'll certainly not do! Much too hot!"

"We'll arrange to have her put in at Colombo for an hour or two."

"She's not stopping there."

"According to the news-sheets, she's not quite full-up with cargo. I fancy a Governm'nt hint would secure a small shipment of tea from Ceylon—no harm tryin' it, at all events. Your bookin' passage with the tea is merely incidental, d'ye see. Your inquiries for the sort of boat your physician ordered turned up the information that this particular one was puttin' in for a few tons of tea—suited your book exactly."

MAJOR CARSTAIRS, before getting down to anything confidential with the lady, had taken the precaution of stepping out through the window and looking down the length of the terrace. He was quite positive that no human being had been near enough to catch a word of what he had been saying to her—and in this, he was right. But rumor has many devious ways of getting itself started. Lieutenant Joe Cheddars, for example, who had been chatting with two women at the other side of the drawing-room, was not in the Governor's confidence nor that of the Staff; but as one of the minor attachés, he had heard, of course, occasional bits of the inside talk which any man of intelligence could put together very close to the mark. So he knew enough of the matter under consideration to be quite sure that His Excellency and the Staff men were probably discussing it at the moment. He saw all four of them covertly glance toward where Lady Follansbee was sitting with her two friends. Then he saw the nods of agreement—saw the Major casually make his way down the room to her. Watching them closely, he could tell from the facial expression that some request was being made—and that the lady was finally consenting.

By keeping close tab on Carstairs during the rest of that afternoon and the following day, he knew that the Major was communicating with certain shipping agents in Delhi and Singapore—then with other agents in Colombo. If his surmises were correct, he worked out a line of probable action very close to the truth. And then he spent two hours coding a message which he cabled to a crony who happened to be in Singapore at the moment. Cheddars was in an almost desperate position—heavily in debt, not knowing where to turn for sums that he needed—in short, in the sort of mental condition where most men look out for Number One and become thoroughly unscrupulous.

The man in Singapore had resigned from the Army a short time before rather than

risk the chance of dismissal if some of his activities became known. By the merest fluke nobody had suspected them up to this time, and his reputation was as good as ever it had been in Army circles—but having thrown overboard personal honor in his struggle to get clear of the entanglements, he also was now unscrupulous—ready for any shady adventure which promised big money. Cheddars' message read, decoded:

> Have positive information who will be entrusted with the Maharajah's proposition—the route and boat to London. Cable me one thousand pounds which I must have at once for urgent needs—agree to five thousand more if you are successful—and I will cable you full data on receipt of it. Suggest that you impersonate Saltoun of the I. S. S. on the boat. Resemblance is striking. Govt. Agt. will recognize you as him and suppose you are detailed as extra precaution. That will make you positive you're on right track. Saltoun supposed to be somewhere up Peninsula. Use another name but make resemblance perfect.

SO much for the leak from Lieutenant Cheddars' intuition. In another case, one of the Hindu servants who was serving tea in the drawing-room worked out an almost identical hypothesis along the same lines—and communicated with two of his own caste in Singapore. All, mind you, without anyone having actually overheard a single word connecting Lady Follansbee with the affair. And this, by way of preliminary, brings the threads of the story together at Singapore on the afternoon when Captain Connyngsby put in with the *Argentine Liberator,* on his voyage to London, to coal at Tanjong Pagar—to pick up whatever passengers and more recent orders his agents might have for him.

As coaling is a messy job at the best, all the passengers had gone ashore for a round of the shops in the commercial quarter and dinner at the Raffles. By the next evening, with bunkers full, the boat was about to pull out from the coal-pier when one of the agents came hurrying aboard with a request that Connyngsby anchor off the P. & O. wharf in Keppel Harbor until later advices came in from Liverpool. There was a prospect of picking up a small shipment of tea at Colombo which would fill the Number Three Hold and be worth putting in for. The shipment wasn't definitely fixed, but the agent expected advices next day that it had been—and the Captain knew it was good business to wait for them, though he was by this time fed up with delays and detours—would have much preferred going straight through without another stop except for coal at Port Saïd.

As it proved, he also picked up three more passengers by waiting—two Babus, who spoke better English than the average and seemed to be men of means, and a tanned Englishman of thirty-five or forty who had about him the suggestion of Army training—the usual reserve of the Britisher who never speaks of his own affairs, and a superimposed ability to mix in anywhere that made him rather liked from the start. He was on the list as C. Leffingwell Gardner, had served during the German War, of course, and was vaguely supposed to be traveling for one of the Oriental exporting houses. Two young women also had been added to the saloon-list while the boat was coaling—the Misses Weymouth and Torrance, going home to visit relatives in England after three years with their parents in the East. Of the former passengers, some of whom had been on the boat since she left New York several months before, there were Miss Betty Stevens, traveling for her health; a Mr. Fernshaw, of London; Mrs. Bently, a wealthy and handsome widow; two Hongkong merchants and a married couple.

As the boat lay anchored out in the harbor next morning—most of the passengers in their deck-chairs under the khaki awning of the boat-deck, where they could get all the breeze which happened to be stirring—Flo Weymouth and Amy Torrance were giving Betty Stevens bits of the Singapore gossip and amusing her with their admiration for the boat's officers.

"What a perfectly ripping lot of men you have on board, Miss Stevens! I'm jolly well pleased we booked on this boat instead of one of the liners! Of course one rather expected that Mr. Coffin would be something out of the ordin'ry, after the things he's done. But Captain Connyngsby is perfectly fine! Doctor Thayer is good enough lookin' to attract any girl—Mr. Swain another of the same sort, though he can't possibly know as much—and McTavish is a jolly old dear. Mr. Jennings and Mr. Fowler are much better bred than officers you'll find on boats of the northern owners. Amy and I like them all—and four aren't married. If you'll tell us which you've picked out for yourself, Miss Stevens, we'll see if we can't get a little attention from the others—though Mrs. Bently'll

not make it too easy for us. It's hardly fair, you know! She must be years older than any of the four! One fancies she might rob a cradle if there were nothing else in sight!"

"Oh, come now, Miss Weymouth! Give the lady her due! She really isn't over thirty. She's pretty, and she's clever, with money enough to make her independent. You wouldn't want the sort of man who'd be willing to live on a rich wife—would



They attempted to bribe some of the Lascars and were nearly stabbed.

you? No self-respecting man would do it—and that's more of a handicap to Mrs. Bently than you might think. And if she's too old for these nice men, I am too—because we're not so far apart in age. . . . . Here comes Mr. Fernshaw! You'll like him a lot, even if he is married."

The introductions were casual—they really were not needed on shipboard—and Fernshaw made his customary good impression. He was entirely at ease anywhere he found himself,—in a moment or two, indeed, he was asking the girls what they knew of an occurrence which had been filling the news-sheets in all of the Oriental ports—the finding of a great and apparently flawless black diamond somewhere in India, by an English engineer who had been traveling pretty much all over the country with two Pathan bearers. It was supposed that he had been prospecting for mineral outcrop of various sorts, because he had a Government permit for that sort of thing; but he seemed to have had no connection with any syndicate, and apparently had been aimlessly wandering through one province after another according to the whim of the moment. It was not even certain that he had found the wonderful stone in India at all, but eventually he had turned up in the Chandni Chowk at Delhi, asking the jewel-merchants if they or any of the maharajahs whom they represented cared to make a bid for the stone. Several of the jewelers had measured and examined it most carefully—the unanimous opinion being that no such black diamond ever had been seen before in any part of the world. Before there was any risk of murder or theft, the engineer had sealed it up in a box and placed it in the up-to-date vaults of the strongest bank in Delhi. By the merest chance Amy Torrance, whose father was in the Government service, supplied additional data which, up to then, hadn't gotten into the newspapers.

"It is known in official circles that Harding, the engineer, was around the old mines of Raolconda and Golconda—which haven't been worked for a hundred years or more. As I understand it, the Nizam reserves the right to purchase at a nominal valuation any great stone found in his province. This was told to Harding by one of the I. S. S. men, but he laughed at him—said they would have to prove that the stone came from Hyderabad or in fact from India at all."

"Aye—he had them there! No black diamond above a few carats ever has been found outside of Borneo. That's not to say, however, that none ever will be."

"At all events they made nothing out of Harding with that sort of talk. But one

of the dealers in the Chandni Chowk, who represents His Highness the Maharajah of Narrapore, had a conference with him in which he pointed out that it would be very difficult for Harding, alone, to get the stone as far as Europe without having it stolen and perhaps losing his life—that when it was sold, there possibly would be litigation with various native princes in India claiming the stone was found in their own provinces—and that he would better take a reasonable sum then and there. Narrapore offered, he said, a couple of lakhs for the stone—no questions asked, all further responsibility assumed by him. After considering this for a day or two, Harding accepted the offer—got the two lakhs in certified checks—had nothing further to do with the diamond. Then Narrapore offered it as a gift to the British Crown on condition that Government would have it cut in Amsterdam to the largest brilliant obtainable from the stone, and call it the Black Star of Narrapore. The home Governm'nt accepted through the Governor of India, who is sending it to England almost immediately, insured by Lloyd's—probably through the special service of the Royal Mails."

"Do you happen to know, Miss Torrance, what the stone weighs in the rough?"

"As I recall it, three hundred and fifteen carats and nine sixty-fourths is the accepted weight. At least half a dozen of the Chandni Chowk dealers figured it very carefully."

Fernshaw's lips puckered in a whistle.

"Gad! I mean to see that thing at first opportunity. It must be absolutely unique —superb! Did you hear anything about its shape?"

"Somewhat like a small potato, they say —very much like the Cullinan before it was cut, though of course much smaller."

"H-m-m—if there are no faults in the cleavage, such a stone might be cut to a brilliant of around two hundred carats. But when they come to splitting along the grain they may have to make two or three smaller gems of it, as was done with the Cullinan. At all events, they'll get one brilliant of somewhere between one hundred fifty and two hundred—and an estimated value of half a million sterling would be merely tentative, because there is nothing like it in the whole world. I couldn't understand the inducement for Narrapore to present it to the Crown, at first, but if they name it after him, he will get far more personal advertising than if he kept an' wore it himself—not such a bad political move, either, considering the conditions throughout India.

"What I *don't* see is why Harding left it go for any such sum as two lakhs! Two hundred thousand rupees would be around fourteen thousand pounds—or sixty-seven thousand American dollars. Supposing he got that stone as far as the Bank of England vaults in London, or some bank in New York, and it were not tied up by the courts,—which I consider a remote contingency,—he quite easily could have found a purchaser who would have paid a hundred thousand pounds for it—possibly double that. His taking the two lakhs is a confession of weakness somewhere. It's a tidy enough bit of money to pocket with no questions asked and no come-back that can implicate him in any way, but everyone who knows anything about the history of precious stones would be practically convinced that the thing never was found in India.

"That means Borneo—with the restrictions which all of the Malay sultans put upon any jewels found in their states. The Dutch Governm'nt itself wouldn't put forward any claim, but the sultans might through the Dutch courts if they got a clue as to Harding's wanderings—and when the Dutch courts start anything, they usually go through with it. Harding is in a vastly diff'rent position from the Maharajah, because he'd go broke fighting any sort of litigation—while Narrapore, with millions in his bank accounts, can sit back and say: 'Prove where the Black Star was found! I know—you don't! The stone is mine, and I'll do what I please with it!' The point which seems regrettable is that after all his wanderings and the constant risk he ran, Harding should have to be satisfied with a trifling fourteen thousand pounds."

SEVERAL times during the first dinner, as the boat steamed up Malacca Strait after leaving Singapore, Captain Connyngsby shot a puzzled glance at the passenger who had booked as C. Leffingwell Gardner. Being rather keen at remembering faces, he was positive the man was really Major Harry Saltoun of the Indian Secret Service, who had sailed with him upon two or three former occasions and who had the reputation of being able to spend days in the bazaars as a Hindu or Pathan or

Parsee without detection. If Saltoun were detailed on special service, it seemed almost certain that he would have changed his appearance to some extent. But merely to book under another name when he was likely to be recognized in any of the Oriental ports seemed an odd thing to do, to say the least. He gave no indication of ever having seen the Captain before—which prevented Connyngsby from making the slightest advance lest he crab the other man's game, whatever it was. But the thing stuck in his mind.

The younger women on board had started without delay a campaign of feminine bedevilment against the attractive officers and were getting their full share of attention, even from the master himself—but in some of their councils of war—stateroom conferences—they were forced to admit that when Betty Stevens had some reason of her own for wishing to monopolize any particular man, none of the other women stood a ghost of a show—not even Mrs. Bently with her wealth and fascination. It was finally concluded that this was due more to Miss Stevens being almost one of the ship's crew because of her several months on board since leaving New York than to any superior quality of attraction about herself—but in this belief they were very far out. Betty Stevens had gone through some rather trying situations with the *Argentine* and her officers—who knew her to be a dead game sport in any emergency and had more solid admiration for the girl herself than for any other woman of their acquaintance. She probably could have married any unattached man on board if he had the slightest idea that she would consider it.

A ship at sea is a little world by itself—which is why so many lifelong friendships ripen in the few days or weeks of the voyage. Each new arrival at the ports of call is studied for indications of his or her breed and type before getting fairly up the gangplank—and is absorbed in a few hours without a ripple. At Colombo, Lady Follansbee was recognized as a personage before she and one of the Ceylon Government officials got as far as the Captain—though she was booked without title, merely as Mrs. Hortensia Follansbee, and appeared to be traveling with a single maid, who was berthed in a separate stateroom. The Government man seemed to have come down to see her off merely as an old personal friend,—he wasn't even in uniform,—but when there was nobody else within hearing, he told Connyngsby that Government expected him to look after Her Ladyship very closely—that because of her views upon certain Indian questions she had received a number of threatening letters which, finally, had begun to get on her nerves until her physician had sent her home to recuperate. The official said it was scarcely possible that any of her enemies could be aboard the *Argentine Liberator,* inasmuch as nobody knew she was sailing until she came aboard, but there might be somebody at Aden or Port Saïd. Connyngsby, who had met Her Ladyship before, assured him that she would be taken care of—and when he went ashore, turned to her with a low question:

"It's to be *Mrs.* Follansbee—not? Aye?"

"Er—quite so, Captain. I'm delighted to find you in command—we must have some good long chats. And if I drop a hint, you wont question it until afterward, will you? There's a man farther along the gangway who may take it upon himself to presume a little—but I don't mean to recognize him at all. Sorry he's aboard—can't be helped, I fancy."

IT must not be inferred that Lady Follansbee was a bluestocking or the aggressive club-woman type, because she occasionally read papers before women's societies and had a gift for politics under the rose. She was unobtrusive, good-looking, a thoroughbred from head to foot, a woman sure of herself in any circumstances. It was a fair sample of her intuition when she picked Betty Stevens for her first steamer-friendship on board. The two were temperamentally congenial.

Snaith, as "C. Leffingwell Gardner," didn't approach Lady Follansbee until he had managed to hear her addressed without her title and picked up a few little details which convinced him that Cheddars' information was well-founded. But after a while he strolled along to where she and Betty Stevens were chatting in their deck-chairs, removed his sun hat as Betty introduced them, and smilingly remarked:

"Mrs. Follansbee and I have met before, I believe?"

Unfolding her lorgnette, Her Ladyship calmly looked him over before speaking.

"That is quite possible, Mr.—er—Gardner. One is constantly meeting all sorts of people, everywhere. I'll not contradict you, of course—it's a matter of no conse-

qu'nce on shipboard. —Er—you were saying, Miss Stevens?"

It could have been taken as a rebuff or not, as he pleased. With Miss Stevens' introduction, he could have remained standing there and would have been included in their conversation, more or less, when he seemed disposed to stay on that basis. But if Lady Follansbee had recognized the man for the impostor he was, studied out a remark and manner that would puzzle him the most concerning her, she couldn't have hit upon anything more effective. Snaith was completely jarred from his self-possession and acted as if he had been caught either in a brazen attempt to claim acquaintance with no grounds whatever, or had received a most unjust and insulting facer. With merely a courteous bow, he strolled away to chat with some of the girls who liked him.

From Her Ladyship's point of view, it appeared self-evident that in spite of her distinct objection to having any of the I. S. S. men accompany her as a matter of extra precaution, Major Carstairs had insisted upon sending one after all—though by getting him aboard at Singapore, he probably thought it impossible for anybody to associate the man with the mission she had undertaken. But she had lived in the East long enough to know that she had been absolutely right in refusing an official guard, that the presence of such an official on board easily might bring suspicion upon herself at some unexpected moment. Had it not been for one vague doubt in her mind, she would have sent a radio to Carstairs that she would place the matter in Major Saltoun's hands at once and leave the boat at Port Saïd—she was that provoked. This doubt was a something about the masquerading Gardner which didn't ring quite true. If Saltoun really were on special service which had no connection with her affair, he was sufficiently clever in his character-impersonations to fool anybody who knew him well without altering his facial appearance. It easily might be that—in which case, her annoyance at Carstairs was unfounded. On the other hand, if the man actually was traveling under his own name and merely bore a close resemblance to the I. S. S. officer, she didn't see how he could suspect her own mission. His claiming former acquaintance with her might have been done in perfect good faith by some man who had been introduced with a crowd of others, but she could recall nobody who so closely resembled Saltoun, and finally decided that he must be on detached service for the Indian Government and had taken that means of warning her not to address him by his own name. In that case he could have asked for nothing better than her manner toward him. They had been introduced as strangers and could be courteous to each other as shipmates without implying previous acquaintance in any way.

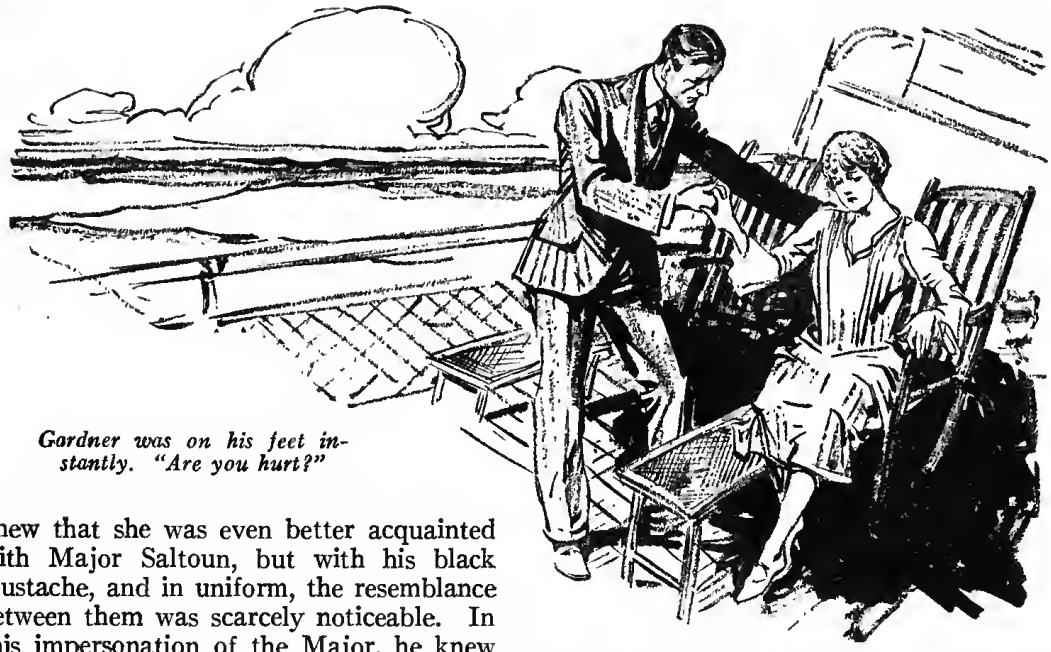
TO Betty Stevens, however, the incident was sufficiently odd to arouse a speculative interest in her mind. Lady Follansbee had given every indication of being considerate to everyone, so that her action was surprising if she had no grounds for it. But the supposed Mr. Gardner had given a favorable impression from the moment he came aboard; it seemed impossible that he would chance any such rebuff unless he supposed that she would recognize him as a former acquaintance. So after a moment or two Betty asked:

"What's wrong about Mr. Gardner? We've quite liked him since he came aboard at Singapore."

"I think I may tell you something in confidence, Miss Stevens—because you've sense enough to see the trouble you might be making if you blabbed. Mr. Gardner is really Major Somebody Else of the I. S. S. I fancy he claimed acquaintance as he did merely as a warning that I must not address him by his own name—which would imply that he's on detached service of some sort. He is somehow vaguely diff'rent from the man I know, in his little mannerisms—but he's so frightfully good at all sorts of characterizations that he may have been trying to make me do just what I did—fail to recognize him. If he's not the Governm'nt man, then I can't recall any occasion upon which we ever met, because the resemblance is so close that I certainly would have spoken of it at the time."

"H-m-m—that accounts for something in the Captain's manner. I've caught an occasional glance at Gardner—whom he must think he knew on some other boat, though the man doesn't seem to know Connyngsby."

As for the supposed Gardner, he was completely up in the air until he'd had a chance to reason out something approximately close to the real situation. As Charlie Snaith of the —th Rifles, he *had* met Lady Follansbee upon several occasions, and



Gardner was on his feet instantly. "Are you hurt?"

knew that she was even better acquainted with Major Saltoun, but with his black mustache, and in uniform, the resemblance between them was scarcely noticeable. In this impersonation of the Major, he knew beyond question that she must suppose him to be the I. S. S. man—indeed he had been addressed as Saltoun on the streets in Singapore before coming aboard. He could vaguely understand that she might suppose him to be on detached service and think it suited his book to consider him a stranger —but, again, she could hardly do that after he had claimed previous acquaintance. If she were engaged by the Governor to carry out the mission Cheddars had seemed so positive about, it seemed to him that she must welcome having assistance close at hand in case of emergency. Her whole manner seemed to indicate that Cheddars, somehow, had been mistaken and had led him on a fruitless chase. But—Cheddars needed money too urgently to make a mistake of that sort. Conceivably, he must have known what he was talking about. If he *was* right, Snaith's impersonation of Saltoun didn't seem to be getting him anywhere. If she took him for Saltoun, there was a strong inference either that she didn't trust him,—hardly a supposable theory,— that she was not carrying out any Government mission, or that, if so, she was determined to play a lone hand and take nobody into her confidence. He didn't know what to think. But he was playing a lone hand himself—and it presently seemed to him that her attitude might be turned to his advantage. As for Connyngsby— Snaith, of course, had no knowledge of any former acquaintance between him and the Major, so had no idea that the Captain considered him a Government officer.

Like Snaith, the two Babus didn't consider it possible that such information as had come to them could have been obtained by anyone else in Singapore in time to book on the *Argentine*. They had no suspicion that he might be in the game; it never occurred to him that *they* had sailed with the same object. Each was concentrating only upon Lady Follansbee, and each was fully as much in doubt about their information having been correct. Ordinarily the Babus would have had the advantage over any European from their skill in hypnotism and ability completely to disappear when one had been speaking to them a second before—but the Ceylon official's hint to Connyngsby had just about spiked any effort they could make. The Captain had understood that she was being threatened by Orientals, hence his first orders in her case had been to Swain, (chief steward and acting purser) to have his stewards maintain the closest possible watch upon the two Babus, as they were the only Orientals on the boat at the time, except the Lascars of their own crew, who were known to be intensely loyal. The result was that they had no opportunity for getting anywhere near her or her stateroom —one of the stewards invariably turning up with some perfectly courteous message which prevented even a word with her. It afterward came out that they had attempted to bribe some of the Lascars and were nearly stabbed for their pains. After that, the Lascars helped the stewards in keeping track of them—but neither, of course, made the slightest attempt to interfere with Snaith's movements or consider

them suspicious. It had gotten about the ship, in the way nobody ever satisfactorily explains, that he belonged to the Raj—which gave him pretty much *carte blanche.* Had he known to what extent this went, he might have been more careless than he was.

WE have now in hand all of the different threads leading up to what occurred on the second night out from Colombo. Lady Follansbee was too clever to invite comment by cutting the supposed Mr. Gardner after he had been introduced to her—particularly when she saw that he was popular. So she permitted the usual steamer-acquaintance with him, finding the man an interesting conversationalist, as, of course, she had known from previous occasions ashore. After dinner on this particular night—one of the loveliest she ever had seen on the Sea of Arabia—she had gone up to her deck-chair with the other passengers, and Gardner had dropped into one next her while he finished his cigar. There was enough of a roll so that the chairs would have shifted, now and then, had it not been for the marline which lashed them to the rail, and, as always in a bit of a sea, the usual noises, creakings, rumblings of the boat herself as a subdued undertone. Presently, during a more pronounced list to starboard, Lady Follansbee stopped what she was saying, with a slight exclamation of pain. Gardner was on his feet instantly with extended hand.

"Er—beg pardon—but—are you hurt?"

"It's nothing, I fancy! Just a bit of a stab in my thigh—possibly a nail, or a splinter from my chair."

"If you'll permit me, we'd best examine the chair and find out which! A rusty nail, you know, calls for antiseptic at once!"

He helped her out of the chair and ran his fingers along the edge of the wood—hard maple, and in the deep shadow cast by one of the power-launches swinging from its heavy davits. In a few seconds he held up a sharp splinter in the moonlight—having loosened it with his pocket-knife when everyone was below at dinner.

"Fancy it must have been this, Mrs. Follansbee! I can feel no trace of a nail. Most of the fastenings on these deck-chairs are screws, you know. The end is quite sharp, as you see—hardwood."

"Oh, it was that, undoubtedly! . . . . Thanks, a lot! Let's see—where were we?"

Continuing the chat for another few minutes, she presently got out of her chair again—said she was going below to her stateroom.

"Fancy I must have eaten too much at dinner—that pudding was unusually good! When I overindulge, I get sleepy. No—don't bother, please! I'm a good sailor. Good night!"

In thinking it over next day, it seemed to her that by the time she reached her stateroom she was so sleepy she could scarcely keep her eyes open—it was an effort to strip off her clothes, get into pajamas and tumble into her berth. As her maid would be along presently, she didn't lock the door, for it was her habit to wake instinctively at the slightest unusual sound. According to the maid's account, she opened the door not over ten minutes later—she was accustomed to putting the room in order for the night before her mistress appeared, then wait to brush and braid her hair. But finding the lady so sound asleep that no question wakened her, she braided the hair as best she could—straightened the clothes and the room and then went out, supposing that Lady Follansbee would wake from her nap in a little while and bolt the door as usual.

Before the bugle sounded for breakfast, a much frightened maid ran below to Swain, in the purser's office, and told him she feared her mistress was dead—lying against the door. Going up with her at once, after sending a steward along for Doctor Thayer, he found the door unlocked but held by what he feared was Her Ladyship's body. Pushing it back with the door as gently as he could, he squeezed inside and lifted her upon the berth—finding to his amazement that she was fully conscious, but gagged and bound. Promptly releasing her, he and the maid were bathing face and neck with cold water when Thayer came in. The Doctor found in a few moments that she was apparently little the worse for her experience and thought her quite able to come below for breakfast when she rather weakly suggested it.

"My room has been completely overhauled, as you see, Doctor—everything turned inside-out—steamer-trunk pulled from under the berth, ransacked and then shoved back again! I've no idea what has been taken, and I'll not bother with it until after breakfast. When I find out, I'll have a talk with the Captain, of course—but meanwhile you and Mr. Swain will please

avoid mentioning this to anybody! Mary'll not blab—she's been with me too long. Now run along, please, and let me dress. My word! How that gag made my jaws ache! Thank you both—so much!"

DURING breakfast there was one man in the saloon who casually glanced at Lady Follansbee and addressed an occasional remark to her as usual—he was very much on his guard to do this in exactly the manner he had used before, and not to betray that he was more than ordinarily interested in her appearance at the moment. But an uneasy feeling, almost fear of something unexpected, seeped through him as he noted that she seemed none the worse for her night's experience and gave no evidence of being worried about anything. Better than anyone else on board, he knew that she *should* be fairly sick with worry, and the unconcerned manner in which she chatted and ate her breakfast, with apparently good appetite, made him wonder if by any possibility he could have been recognized by a seemingly unconscious woman. After breakfast she went in a leisurely way up to the Captain's cabin —shutting the door when he would have left it open.

"Captain—something occurred last night which makes it necessary to ask for your assistance at once. You've read the newssheets accounts of the wonderful black diamond known as the Black Star of Narrapore? In fact, I heard you discussing it with some of the ladies. It was accepted from the Maharajah by the Governor of India on behalf of the Crown—and the sending of any great jewel such a distance is always a serious matter involving some risk. A few have been sent through the registered mails without mishap—but this stone is unique. The Governor's first decision was to send it by two of the I. S. S. men, traveling as merchants or tourists, but there was the risk of their being spotted. I had successfully carried out missions for the Government upon former occasions, and it was thought that I would be less likely to be suspected than any man would be—so I was entrusted with the stone, which I've been carrying in a chamois pouch strapped next to my skin in a position where it wouldn't be noticeable through my clothes. Last night, I fancy I must have been drugged in some way, my room was turned upside-down—and evidently I was handled rather unscrupulously while unconscious. The stone is gone. Nobody knows of this except my maid, Mr. Swain, Doctor Thayer—and yourself. I suppose you may feel it necess'ry to enlist the services of two or three of your officers in trying to recover the diamond—but I fancy you'd best limit the knowledge to as few as possible. Of course, on a boat of this size, one might conceal such a thing where it wouldn't be found for years. But at least you can prevent anybody from going ashore without a thorough search of person and luggage. There was some talk of your stopping for passengers at Aden, but I understand that was left optional with you to some extent—you can easily find a reason for not doing it. That would give us from now until we coal at Port Saïd. If we don't find it by then, it might be tossed ashore through one of the ports when we're tied up at the coal-wharves. Now—what do you suggest?"

CONNYNGSBY was, for a moment, very much upset—realizing the unpleasant notoriety resulting from anything of the sort on his boat, even though no responsibility could attach to him or his officers. For a second or two, indeed, he wondered if he were quite sure as to that. Reaching into a drawer of his desk for an exceptionally good cigar, he lighted it—puffed for a minute before answering:

"I'd say, I fancy, that we'd best put the very best brains we've got aboard on this job—have a conference up here where we may question you upon points which you may not have considered important. Seems to me we'll get ahead faster, much more certainly, by sitting down an' thinking this matter out than attempting to ransack the whole ship. What?"

"My idea precisely, Captain! I've heard it said that you've a good head—and I'm sure of it now. Who do you suggest?"

"Ned Coffin—whom you'll know from the press accounts is a top-side man in the mate line. Doctor Thayer, Swain, McTavish, who'll be able to spot anything suspicious in the engine-room an' stokehold gangs—an' I fancy we may get valuable assistance from Miss Stevens. She's by way of being personal secretary to one of the big American railway magnates, accustomed to handling all sorts of problems —an' she thinks a good bit faster than I do. Been on this boat so long that she's almost one of us. So has Fernshaw—who's

a confidential agent for Lloyd's an' vitally int'rested in this particular stone, inasmuch as they've insured it for a staggering price."

"I'd rather bring him into the matter at some later time if we are unsuccessful. Miss Stevens and the others I approve without reservation—but I fancy that will be enough to find the stone if it's to be done in a quiet way, and we may rely upon their being close-mouthed."

One by one, watching their chance to slip up the port ladder to the bridge unobserved, and then along to Connyngsby's cabin, the others dropped in—after which the door was locked. Ned Coffin's first question was as to whether Lady Follansbee suspected any one person.

"No. I looked about my room very carefully for any little object which might have been dropped—for noticeable finger-marks—but I couldn't find a clue of any sort. I must have been in a very heavy sleep from the time I tumbled into my berth until sometime after sunrise when I found myself gagged and bound—tried to get up—and fell against the door. There's no doubt that I was drugged. Have you any Lascars, Malays or Hindus in the galley, Mr. Swain?"

"Not one! French, Scotch and Irish."

"Have you any stewards who might, conceivably, attempt anything like this?"

"Fancy not. Some of our stewards were bribed in a case of attempted piracy on the way up from Batavia to Manila—but we got rid of every one and overhauled the new ones very thoroughly before taking them on—looked up the references of each man. Our Lascars, for'ard, have been tested a dozen times—an unusually fine picked lot. In fact, I'd say rather positively that one of the passengers got the stone!"

Coffin nodded emphatically—he felt pretty certain as to the thief.

"My idea exactly, Tommy! And you'll find the two Babus have the stone! They may be in the pay of some maharajah, or acting on their own, but any Oriental could dispose of that diamond for a higher price than a white man, with no questions asked. Such a stone would be what they're always looking for to stick on the Number One idol in some temple—"

"Well—that's true enough. But those two Babus have been watched more closely than anyone else from the moment they stepped aboard, on the chance that they might have some intention of murdering Her Ladyship. The tip from that Government chap at Colombo led us to suspect something of the sort—though of course we know now that the object was a diff'rent one entirely. Well, those two Hindus were playing chess in the smoke-room an' drinking their everlawsting sherbets from the time Lady Follansbee went below until the lights were turned off. They went directly to their room, taking the chess-board with them—kept their light burning until four-bells in the morning, and smoke coming through the blind. From two until six the night-shift of the saloon stewards didn't see either one come out—though I fancy they might have climbed out of their window without being seen. One of the Lascars was on watch along that gangway, but he might have gone for'ard for a couple of minutes. I'd say there'll be scarcely a chance of their bein' mixed up in this."

SWAIN'S data was disappointing to most of them, because they had jumped to the conclusion that the only Oriental passengers on board were most probably the thieves, and fully half stuck to that belief. But an idea occurred to the Captain:

"I say! We've an I. S. S. man aboard, you know—though I've respected his incognito on the chance that he's on special service. Seems to me we should bring him into this—he'd have a lot of native data that would never occur to us. What?"

There were two immediate protests.

"No! I object to that very strongly, Captain!" This from Mrs. Follansbee.

"I think it might prove a serious mistake, Captain," said Betty Stevens. "You're referring of course to Mr. Gardner. We all like him more or less—he seems to be as straight as a string, and yet there's something about him which has been puzzling me for the last two days. I don't know a thing against the man, but he's about the last one I'd bring into this!"

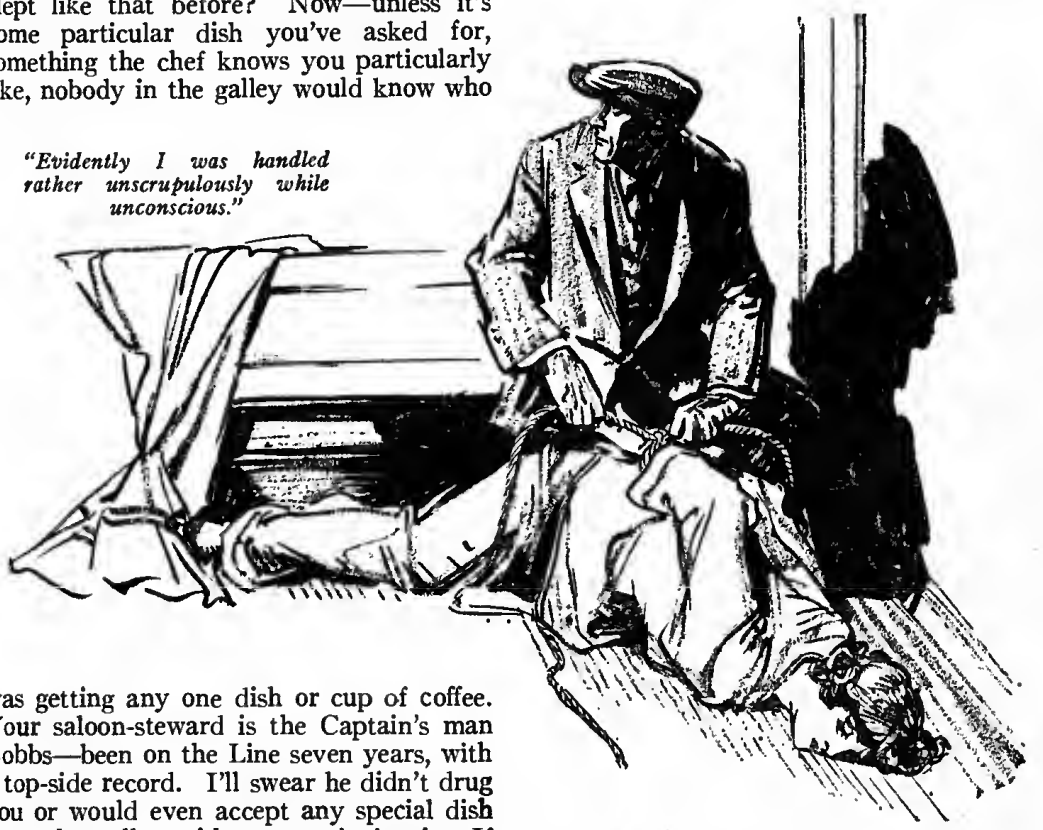
"What's Your Ladyship's objection?"

"I'm reasonably sure, as you are, that Gardner is really Major Saltoun—but at times I'm by no means positive."

"Hmph! It just occurs to me that there'll be a way of testing that. Saltoun was in the war, of course—struck by shell-fragment at second Ypres—inside of right leg above the knee—never healed properly. If anything whacks him in just that spot, he's almost crazy with pain for a moment or two. Well—I'll stumble against him before long an' manage to whack it. Then we'll know—positively!"

"He's not claiming to be Saltoun, on board. If you find he's not, you prove nothing more than a case of strong resemblance—nothing in the least against the man, who may not even know of it."

"Your Ladyship says that you were unquestionably drugged—because you never slept like that before? Now—unless it's some particular dish you've asked for, something the chef knows you particularly like, nobody in the galley would know who



"Evidently I was handled rather unscrupulously while unconscious."

was getting any one dish or cup of coffee. Your saloon-steward is the Captain's man Bobbs—been on the Line seven years, with a top-side record. I'll swear he didn't drug you or would even accept any special dish from the galley without mentioning it. If drugged, it must have been somewhere else. Can you think of any circumst'nce when such a thing might have happened?"

"Not unless a splinter from a maple deck-chair would put me into such a sleep as that! Mr. Gardner and I were chatting on the boat-deck when I shifted about in my chair and ran the splinter into my thigh. He helped me up, then found the thing—broke it off and showed it to me. Dare say it may be down there in the scuppers yet—"

"When was this?"

"Ten or fifteen minutes before I went below, last night."

A soundless whistle puckered Miss Stevens' lips. She casually asked:

"Who has the corner room, for'ard—next to Mr. Gardner's?"

"Vacant. That and its adjoining bath form one of the two de-luxe staterooms—usually reserved for owners' friends or some personage like the Sultan of Bungi-Trelak. Her Ladyship has the corresponding one on the starboard side," replied Swain.

"Could the bath be used by Mr. Gardner—from his room?"

"If he wished to pay four bob a day more for it. The bath communicates with both staterooms through doors which may be bolted on either side. Of course, if Gardner had been using the bath, it would have been reported by his room-steward—but he's not. Saves his money by havin' a regular hour in one of the public baths."

Betty changed the subject as if it no longer interested her.

"It seems to me we'll get on faster, from here, if we try to figure it out by deduction. Doctor, you've been on the boat long enough to know the whole crew pretty well, and you'll admit that whoever figured out the plan to steal the diamond as it *was* stolen must have a more clever brain than the average person—not? Well, can you think of any Lascar, stoker, greaser, or steward, whose brains are in that class?"

Doctor Thayer shook his head.

"I can't think of a single one—and I've talked with or prescribed for all of them!

The Lascars are more or less psychic, like all Orientals, intuition cultivated to a surprising degree, but they lack the initiative to do things on their own. The stokers are mostly animals, or they wouldn't take that sort of a job. Greasers a notch or two more intelligent—they have to be if they keep fingers and limbs from being crushed by machinery in motion. Stewards —well, you occasionally meet one with a first-class head, but he doesn't ship as steward more than one or two voyages. Ours are of average intelligence, but they lack both the nerve and the initiative to figure out anything like this and get away with it."

"Then, as Lady Follansbee was the only passenger who came aboard at Colombo, and as there was no thought of sending the stone by her until two days before we left Singapore, that would seem to eliminate everybody on board except the two Babus, Gardner, Flo Weymouth and Amy Torrance, who came aboard there. On fairly strong circumstantial evidence, there's no other conclusion to be reached than that —is there?"

"H-m-m—now that you've put it in that clean-cut way, Miss Betty, I think I'd agree with you. On any logical basis, the rest of us must take the same view. And I'd point out that if you eliminate all of the crew upon the ground of insufficient brains, you must leave out the two girls as well—not? Nice attractive girls, good company, read the popular novels and some of the gazettes —but most certainly not with the sort of brains this calls for."

"All right! I wont push this to a snap conclusion just now—overconfidence makes as many mistakes as ignorance. Let's get another slant. Assuming that you, personally, *have* brains enough for this,—and I guess nobody here will dispute that,—what would be your probable course, if your plan worked out successfully and you'd actually gotten the stone into your possession? What you figure on as the safest disposition you could make of it—at once?"

"That requires a little thought. You see, up to this time, I've never stolen a jewel of that size. I would know instinctively that I and my baggage would be searched, sooner or later—every cranny of my stateroom also. I'd try to think of a place where it could be safely concealed until the boat was entering the Thames, if necessary —some place where it wouldn't occur to anyone else to look for it, and yet where I could recover it within an hour or so. Might even leave it until the boat sailed on her next voyage and then book on her, no matter which way she was going."

"Precisely! Nine men out of ten would follow that line of reasoning after getting the stone! Well, our problem is to find that place within the next seven days, before we reach Port Saïd. It looks to me as if that's all there is to it."

Connyngsby grinned—then the troubled look came back into his face.

"Hmph! That 'all' will take some doing, Miss Betty—on a boat of this size!"

"Not if we do it with our heads, Captain —instead of trying to find the needle in the haystack with our hands and feet. The man who did find it dug down into the hay with a flash-light at just the one spot where it was lost, you know—he wasted no time on the rest of the stack."

WHEN the conference broke up, Miss Stevens went below with the mate and Thayer to Coffin's room on the main-deck, where she closed the door—and then asked them who stole the diamond. Ned Coffin, with a gesture of impatience, said: "The two Babus, of course!" Betty smiled at him in a slightly maternal way.

"Neddie, boy—you've done so many big things on this boat that I've been expecting you to blow up and show a streak of poor judgment somewhere. Now if you weren't frightfully upset over the probable effect of this on the boat and all of you, when it gets out, you wouldn't be so apt to jump at conclusions—you'd use your bean to better advantage. What do *you* say, Doctor?"

"Gardner! Without much question. He jabbed a hypodermic into Her Ladyship's thigh, in the deep shadow behind that launch—and didn't even have to pick the lock of her door! He figured that she'd be too far gone to get out of her berth after Mary left the room."

"After that splinter story, it's pretty nearly a cinch, isn't it? All right! Now let's go up and get that stone while the getting's good! One of you pass the word to Lady Follansbee and the Captain to keep Gardner on the boat-deck, aft, for a good hour and a half, if possible. Then get a big screw-driver, a small one, a good-sized gimlet—and a pocket flash-light—wrapped up in a parcel, so that nobody will know what you're carrying. One by one, we'll sneak into that big for'ard room

when nobody is looking. One of you get the key from Tommy and tell him to keep mum. Come along, now! No telling how long it may take us!"

The walls of the officers' rooms on the main-deck were simply the ship's plating covered with two coats of white enamel, but the passengers' staterooms on the boat-deck were sheathed in yellow pine as far as the ceiling and painted with the same enamel, so that between the cushioned transoms and the outer plating of the deck-house there was a space with a depth of four inches providing a pocket for the windows and their blinds.

When they were in the room, Betty's first action was to go down on her knees with the flash-light and closely examine the wooden sheathing under the lower berth and under the transom, opposite. In a moment or two she reached up for the little screw-driver and commenced scraping at the cracks where one of the yellow pine strips joined the others on either side—for the light showed that it had been sawed through, close to the deck and the under side of the transom. In the third strip from it, she also noticed the point of a wood-screw which had been driven in from the space back of it. Loosening and prying out the strip with the big screw-driver, she reached her arm through the opening and felt around for the head of that screw. As she expected, her fingers touched a steel wire suspended from a round screw-eye—and hanging from that wire, was a tightly wrapped package which she pulled out. In it they found the chamois pouch, with its straps, and a malevolently sparkling chunk which gleamed and flashed in the sunlight that came through the forward port.

They were so fascinated with the wonderful thing that they wasted precious time examining it, until Betty realized this and set to work putting back the strip under the transom and filling the cracks with bread-crumbs as she had found it. Locking and bolting the bathroom door on Gardner's side, they managed to leave the room without being seen, then went below to the purser's office, where, after seeing what they had, Tommy Swain immediately sent for Lady Follansbee. When she joined them, he suggested her doing up the stone in a waterproof package and sealing it with her ring—then permitting him to place it in the boat's strong-room just under where he was standing, assuring her it was the latest thing in steel safety-vaults installed upon any ship. This she consented to do.

"I considered it when I came aboard, but there is the risk of collision at sea, running foul of a derelict and foundering—in which case there'd be no time to get it. If we were on deep-water, it would be lost forever, you know. But I fear I must take that chance, now. By the way, the Captain accidentally knocked Gardner's leg with a camp-stool—and apologized. Gardner merely grinned—said he scarcely noticed it. But that merely proves he's not Saltoun—which he never has claimed."

"Hmph! I'll prove a darned sight more than that in a few days, I guess! Just wait until he wants Tommy Swain to shift him into that corner room!"

HALFWAY up the Red Sea, after having found the steward had locked him out of the bath and corner room, as he supposed—Gardner made this request upon the ground that it was better ventilated and that he wasn't feeling quite fit. He made no demur over the extra price for that room, but didn't care to pay for the bath—which was then locked against the corner room. And the first hour that he spent in his new quarters he was closely watched by five people through the bathroom bulkhead by means of tiny gimlet-holes. As Miss Stevens had foreseen, one of his first acts was to get down and pry out that strip under the transom. He was cursing when he stood up again.

Connyngsby had all the evidence he needed to put the man in the brig for the remainder of the voyage and turn him over to the London authorities, but there seemed nothing to be gained by it. If Gardner brazened it out, the case against him wasn't any too good—supposing, for example, that he swore he'd been merely groping under the transom for a missing cuff-button. (Gimlet-holes are pretty small.) The fellow was punished enough in his disappointment over losing the stone after actually having it in his possession—but the main consideration was the advisability of suppressing all evidence that the diamond was or had been on the boat at any time.

At Tilbury a launch with two King's Messengers and several Secret Service men from the Foreign Office took Lady Follansbee off, while her maid went in a car to the Savoy with the luggage—and they didn't leave her until the Black Star of Narrapore was safely in the Bank of England vaults!



The action is fast and furious in this, the climax of the best novel yet written by the author of "Tyrell of the Cow Country" and "Hidden Trails."

Go-getter Gary

Jack yelled warningly and as Lobo Leet popped an eye past the corner of the wall Gary let drive with both guns.

The Story So Far:

AS body-guard to a prominent personage back East, he had earned the name of Go-getter Gary. And when slow recovery from a bullet-wound sent him to the West to recuperate, he all too soon found exercise for his peculiar talents as expert pistol-shot. For he stumbled, first thing, into a lively little cattle-war, and the way of it was this:

A chance acquaintance had told him he could find employment with one Vance Austell, owner of the "Hat-on" ranch, but his first meeting with Austell was unfortunate. Leaving the train at a little New Mexican town, he looked about for some one who could direct him, saw no one, and made his way to a tumble-down store. And there in the back room, he came upon Austell and a young ranchman Jack Royd in a violent quarrel. Austell had encouraged Royd to drink heavily and had won all his money—and his ranch to boot—at poker. And entering the store behind Gary came a fellow-traveler from the train—Royd's sister Connie.

Gary's quick wit and the presence of the girl saved that situation. Then Deputy-sheriff Lobo Leet, a henchman of Austell, allowed Gary to attempt making his way on foot over the long desert miles to the ranch. He was picked up exhausted by the Royds and left at Austell's ranch, but found scant hospitality there. The Hat-on cowboys gave him an outlaw horse to ride and he barely escaped with his life. Austell hired him finally—as a gunman to aid him in his quarrel with the Royds. But as soon as opportunity offered Gary left Austell's place and sought out the Royds. He found they had discharged their few employees and were about to acknowledge Austell's poker-claim to their property by abandoning it. He persuaded them, however, to stay and fight, and himself enlisted under their banner as gunman extraordinary and at large.

At the round-up which followed shortly thereafter, further ill-feeling developed; bitterness between Austell, the Royds, and Tonto Drake, the third rival cattle-owner in the region, grew apace. And Gary found himself the object of suspicion on all sides. Austell tried to force Gary to carry out his bargain to shoot Jack Royd. Failing in this, he succeeded in discrediting Gary with the Royds through his hench-

By ROBERT AMES BENNET

Illustrated by L. R. Gustavson



man the Deputy-sheriff Lobo Leet—who appeared at the round-up with a telegram purporting to come from Chicago and identifying Gary as a murderer with a reward on his head. Leet endeavored to provoke Gary to draw his weapon in order that he might have justification before witnesses for killing him, but Gary submitted to being handcuffed. Only when he came to realize that Leet intended to copy the notorious Mexican *"ley juega"*—shoot his prisoner on the journey to town and report him killed while attempting to escape—did Gary act. Then, with his handcuffed hands, he snatched Royd's pistol, crippled Leet, and made his escape. Evading attempts to shoot him from ambush on the way to town, he found temporary refuge with the decrepit old caretaker at the ranch of Tonto Drake. *(The story continues in detail:)*

THE west-end round-up was a larger and more difficult operation than that of the east. By the time Drake and his riders came trailing to his ranch ahead of the outfit's chuck-wagon, Gary felt and looked like a new man. Though his chest had not yet fully healed, he had regained almost all his strength.

Drake showed no surprise over seeing him at the ranch. The Hat-on cook had dropped a hint to the Tonto hasher that the dude gunman had out-foxed his dry-gulchers by hitting the Tonto trail.

"When I seen four-five his men was gone," concluded the cow-man, "I tried to put it on Austell he'd sent 'em to get you. 'Taint any too easy roping a slicker like him. He tells Royd and his sister he let his extra hands go, owing to Royd getting his own bunch back. He says 'twas none his business if his laid-off riders went to take the killer—meaning you—to get that thousand reward. He says he tol' 'em to take you alive, even though you tried to murder the deputy-sheriff."

Gary fixed upon the only angle of this that interested him. "Miss Royd could not have believed him?"

"Well, I aint saying she did, and I aint saying she didn't. He's a smooth liar. He's got even Royd most ready to feed out of his hand ag'in, same's he uster. The gal's a right smart little cuss. She aint so easy soft-sawdered. All the same, she's waiting only for him to prove he didn't cut out that bronc's tongue."

"Did he?" asked Gary.

Drake spat and answered tersely: "Bronc' threw him onto a cholla—bit his arm. Crazy hawse. Ought 'a' been shot. Was given the walking death. Draw yore own conclusions who done it."

The cow-man spat again, and changed the subject. "Bill says yuh got the makings. Care to go on the pay-roll?"

"Not till I can do enough to be worth wages," Gary replied. He looked down at his shapely new high-heeled boots. "Bill said you always ordered them too tight and you wouldn't mind my breaking them in for you."

"Keep 'em, kid. They're yourn. 'Taint safe to ride with that boot Lobo shot the heel off'm. You'd get hung up and drug if yore bronc' throwed you."

This, even more than Bill's friendliness, convinced Gary that he was beginning to belong. He knew it would take a long while for him to become a competent roper

and rider. But it meant a great deal that Tonto Drake considered him good enough to hire.

What rounded out the situation for Gary, the Tonto punchers were neither hostile toward him, like the Hat-on gang, nor were they overpolite and offish, as had been the Box R riders. They ignored alike his "gats" and his "dudeness," and initiated him into the order of cowboys with rough practical jokes.

As Gary took even water-filled boots with a smile, the horseplay soon stopped. The Tontos were an oldish lot, slow and quiet in their talk. Gary surmised that they would be more dangerous in a fight than any of Austell's hand-picked swaggering gunmen.

He had several days in which to make the acquaintance of the outfit and fit himself to become one of its members. Crude and hard as were the conditions at the Tonto, he had no wish to leave. He even began to speculate whether he might not be able to buy into a partnership with Drake. The bonds that he had been salting away for years could be sold above par. But would the old cow-man wish to share his iron with a partner? If he regarded it as a personal possession, rather than a business, he might be touchy over any proposal.

Gary started to feel his way by seemingly casual remarks to Bill and the other men. What he learned from them rather inclined him to believe that their grim boss would not welcome any offer to buy in with him. At any rate, it was a matter that called for discretion.

WHILE Gary was still hesitating over his next move, the ranch had a visitor. Gary had helped Bill cut and haul a wagonload of rails from the nearest growth of trees to mend the corrals. On their return Gary called Bill's attention to a strange horse between the adobe buildings.

"Sorter looks like one of Lobo's bronc's, kid," Bill commented dryly.

Gary put his hands down. He now "packed his gats" in holster pockets sewn on the front of his old chaps. He was not yet accustomed to the change from the pockets of his discarded coat.

But the man who came from the bunkhouse with Drake did not carry one arm in a sling, nor was he tall and stringy. Gary's life had all too often depended upon his instant recognition of faces. One glance at the big fattish visitor was enough.

He had the advantage of the Sheriff. In his cowboy rig, and with his one-time white sickly face altered by sunburn and overflowing vitality, he was so changed that Sutton did not know him until he spoke.

"Howdy, Sheriff. Are you looking for me?"

"Lord! Who'd 'a' thought it?" boomed the visitor with loud heartiness. He offered a fat hand. "You're looking tip-top. Nobody'd take you for a lunger now."

Gary quirked his lips. "How about taking me for a killer?"

"Uh—that—" hesitated the Sheriff.

Drake's rusty-iron face was more morose than before, as he cut in grimly:

"I tol' Sut it's up to you, kid. No need you going if you don't want to. Fact is, it kind of looks like I can use you in yore own line."

"Aw, hold on, Tont'," remonstrated Sutton in his bluff tone of good-natured friendliness. "You agreed to let me talk to him."

"Shoot," grunted the cow-man.

"*Muchas gracias!* Always knew you were on the square, Tont'." The Sheriff fixed his rather fishy eyes upon Gary. "Here's the how of it, boy: Lobo got what was coming to him. He had no business hazing you after you surrendered. He's a minus deputy."

"You mean that you've taken away his star—that he's no longer an officer?"

"Just that. The fool put me in a bad hole. I've got to apologize for what he done. Same time, I'm Sheriff. Thought I'd come and talk it over with you. I've got a hunch the charge against you is a frame-up. You was so gentlemanly offering to go in with Lobo, it struck me you might help me out by coming in to clear yourself. No questions of cuffs or frisking."

"I see," bantered Gary. "You wouldn't mind my helping you collect that thousand-dollar reward."

Sutton looked a bit sheepish. "What d'you say we split it?"

"That goes," agreed Gary. He turned to his scowling boss. "Half the reward will more than pay my expenses, Mr. Drake. I want to clear my name. When I come back, I'll bring along a roll to buy an iron or an interest in one."

"Ugh!" grunted Drake. "If you go, you stay gone."

With that, he turned his back on Gary and waddled around the wagon to rumble

an order to old Bill. The Sheriff was shaving a plug of tobacco to fill his pipe. Gary shifted around to look past him at Drake.

"Never dreamed he'd dislike so to have me leave."

Sutton bent close for a confidential explanation:

"It's not you that's r'iled him, boy. Y'see, when Lobo reported and I fired him, he'd last seen you with the Box R outfit. Knowing Royd was a hot-headed fool, I waited all this time after the round-up to give you and him time to simmer down. Rode out to the Box R day 'fore yesterday. They claimed you *vamoosed* right after you winged Lobo."

"Correct," confirmed Gary.

"Sure, boy. Only how'd I know it? Figured they had you hid out on me. Started back, then did some quiet circle-riding. Didn't cut any sign of you, but—" Sutton heaved a ponderous sigh. "Uh-ah! If only I wasn't a sheriff, so's I could 'a' kept my mouth shut!"

"Yes?" Gary questioned.

The Sheriff took off his hat to mop his bald head with a silk handkerchief.

"If you want to know, I aim to be a *peace* officer. But I'm always running plumb into trouble. Circling west of Royd's headquarters, I stumbled onto a fence 'cross a little box cañon. Up the cañon was a bunch of cows and calves. The calves was all fresh branded with the Box R."

"Well?"

Sutton jammed on his hat.

" 'Taint well a-tall. It's plain hell. Them cows was all Tontos."

"What! You mean that Jack Royd—"

"No, I don't mean nothing. All I'm doing is just stating the actual facts like I done to Tonto. There was also a bunch of Tonto hawses in the cañon. You savvy now what's got him on the peck."

Gary did not reply. He thought that the Sheriff was lying. Yet how could he be sure? Bill had told all too many tales of the liberality of cow-men in helping themselves to each other's stock. According to the old buckaroo, more than one cattle-king had built up his first herd with cows that did not belong to him.

For all Gary knew, Connie's brother was merely following an old cow-country custom, the only crime about which was to be found out. But in this case his rustling had been discovered—unless Sutton lied. One look at Drake's morose face was enough to show that the old gun-fighter did not consider the rustling of his stock any joke.

The first thought that occurred to Gary was to slip away on his pinto and warn Jack. Sober second thought smothered the impulse. He had saved Jack from Austell's gun, that first morning in Lobo Leet's store. He had prevented Connie's brother from giving up his ranch and cows to the card-cheat. He had backed him against the whole Hat-on gang. As his only reward, Jack had tied the can on him.

True, Connie had saved his life. But her brother had shared only grudgingly in the rescue. He was sullen even with his sister, and Austell had claimed he did not treat her right. Not improbably, she might be better off without such a brother.

At any rate, Gary felt that he was not called upon to interfere. The Box R wanted nothing to do with him. Even Connie had given him his walking-papers. Besides, if Jack had not rustled Drake's calves or horses, he could, no doubt, prove his innocence. On the other hand, if he really was guilty, he deserved punishment all the more for having brought the shadow of crime upon such a sister as Connie.

Drake had started off with Bill. Gary muttered a query that bobbed up out of his seething thoughts: "Will he come in with us to swear out a warrant against Royd?"

"Tell you better tomorrow," replied the Sheriff.

He lit his pipe and led his horse into the corral. Gary went to bring in his pinto, ready for a dawn start. When he came back, everyone was at supper. Drake's mood appeared to have lightened. He even joked gruffly with Sheriff Sutton.

In the bunk-house the punchers passed up their usual nightly card-game and took to their bunks early. Gary was glad to follow suit. He had swung an ax most of the day and was dog tired. He slept like a log.

AT the dawn breakfast Drake's chair and the bench places of the four top riders were vacant. A careful ignoring of this fact on the part of the other men kept Gary from asking questions.

Sutton showed such uneasiness to get started that Gary humored his haste. Sunrise found them on the trail. The Sheriff set off at a brisk trot. The farther they went, the more his uneasiness seemed to

increase. He soon put his bronco into a lope.

All of this, like the absence of Drake and the four top riders from the breakfast-table, puzzled Gary. But he kept his eyes open and his mouth shut. Sutton had made no attempt to search or handcuff him.

MILE after mile they covered the twists and turns, dips and rises of the desert trail, as the sun climbed up from the eastern horizon. The pace set by Sutton was so rapid that mid-morning found them far along toward the fork in the road.

At sight of the distant marker butte, the Sheriff for the first time came to a halt. He threw out his hand and turned to look at Gary with a show of vast concern on his heavy face.

"I wont stand for it!" he burst out. "Tonto backed me last election, and Royd didn't. All the same, that don't let me out. I got to try to do my duty."

"I'm coming right along with you," promised Gary.

" 'Taint you," disclaimed Sutton. "Lord, if I hadn't no more to worry me! No, it's Royd. Didn't you catch on? Tonto has gone after Royd. Not a word to me about swearing out a warrant. You must savvy what that means."

"I see. He'll take Jack himself."

Sutton flung out his fat hand. "Take him! You're sure a greenhorn. He's gone to *get* him!"

"No!"

"What else?" The oozing sweat on the Sheriff's face was now unmistakable. "I made a slip telling him where I found that fenced cañon. He'll check me up on them calves and hawses. And then—aint you ever heard of vigilanting rustlers?"

The raised hand made a loop around the fat red neck and jerked upward.

"It can't be!" protested Gary. "You must have courts and law out here nowadays. It's been twenty years since Mr. Drake's last fight. He'll only bring Jack in for trial."

"Who—Tonto Drake? When he'll have trees and a rope handy? Even if Jack tried to put up a fight, he'll have no more chance than he'd have against you or Lobo."

Gary had been talking against his own belief that the old gun-fighter was quite capable of lynching or shooting anyone who rustled his stock. The situation looked black for Jack Royd. But Sutton was Sheriff. Why all this talk, instead of action?

"Maybe it's not too late, Sheriff. If Drake has to hunt up that cañon, perhaps we can make the ranch ahead of him."

" 'We?' " queried Sutton.

"Yes. I'll go along with you."

The blank look on Sutton's face was followed by a broad smile of relief.

"Say, boy, say, aint it true I sized you up for a gentleman, minute I set eyes on you? Only trouble, Royd is sore at me for going out there. He let on it was owing to his friendliness for you, but we savvy now it was that rustling of his. Anyway, he threatened to shoot if I ever came back. Fact is, he's had a grouch against me since last year, when he got soused and tried to shoot up the town."

"What of it? You're Sheriff."

"But what good would it do the young bullhead if we had to shoot him in order to take him? Might as well leave him to Tonto. No, by jakes, I've got it! You've played square with me, boy. I'm betting the charge against you is a frame-up."

"It is," said Gary.

"Sure. All right, then, here's the layout: You're a friend of Royd's. Leastways, I heard that Miss Connie saved you from dying of thirst. You'll want to pay her back by getting her brother a fair trial for what he's done. The fool would sure pop loose at me. But like as not he'll come along peaceful if you tackle him alone."

"I'm not an officer."

This set the Sheriff to fumbling in his pocket. He fished out a badge.

"Here's Lobo's star. I hereby deputize you to go and bring in Jack Royd on the charge of rustling stock."

Gary paused to consider. "I'm not thinking of Jack. Trouble is, I'm already in bad with Miss Connie. She'll not thank me for arresting her brother."

"You don't savvy, boy. It's just what she *will* do, soon's she knows Tonto is after him. She'll want him to have his chance with a jury. You can figure what chance he has with Tonto Drake. This old bronc' I hired off the station-agent is a give-out hawse. You're straddling the best thoroughbred in the country. If any hawse can, he'll get you to the Box R before Tonto."

Gary plucked the deputy-sheriff badge out of Sutton's fat fingers and jumped the pinto into a gallop on a cross-slant for the Box R trail.



Sutton did not know him until he spoke. "Howdy, Sheriff. Are you looking for me?"

CHAPTER XIX

AT the Tonto ranch Gary had learned something of the limit that should be put upon an overwilling horse. He held the pinto down to ten miles an hour. That was enough to bring him in sight of the Box R ranch nearly half an hour before noon.

His first look down into the green little valley was directed in anxious search for Tonto Drake and his waddies. Sight of men quietly at work on the new upper crib of the dam took the saw-edge off his dread. It showed him that his roundabout run over the open desert had beaten Drake's cut across the bad lands of the west-end winter range.

Yet any moment the old-time gun-fighter might come racing to revenge himself for the stealing of his stock by Connie's brother. Gary called upon the pinto for a final spurt.

As they neared the dam, he saw there were only three workers. Jack and two of his punchers were nowhere in sight. That looked bad. If Sutton had not lied, Jack might have gone to do something with the stolen stock, or perhaps to rustle another bunch. In either case Drake probably would "catch him with the goods." No chance then to save the fool.

The dam-builders had stopped work to stare at the hasty visitor to the Box R. One of them picked up a rifle. But Gary paid no heed to the half-raised weapon. He had no time to waste. If Jack was away, Connie must at once be warned of the danger to her brother. She might know how to reach him in time.

With no more than a wave of his hand to the threatening men, Gary raced past them straight for the ranch buildings. Behind him he heard three roaring reports of the rifle. But no bullets cracked past him. The shots had been fired only as a signal.

Before he had passed half the length of the water-hole he saw Jack and a puncher step from the open gateway of the horse-breaking corral. Another puncher followed them on horseback. Then Connie came hastening from the ranch-house, with Pete a close second.

This accounted for every member of the Box R outfit. None was off rustling or riding herd on rustled stock. Yet Sheriff Sutton looked far too shrewd to be a bungling fool. He would not have sent on a wild-goose chase a submissive prisoner who was to bring him at least half a thousand-dollar reward. He must have had a solid basis for his accusation against Jack. Very probably he really had seen that bunch of rustled stock.

Just possibly one or more of the Box R punchers had done the rustling without the knowledge of their boss. However that might be, Tonto Drake would need only to see the stolen calves and horses with his own eyes. He would then act first and ask questions afterward. According to Bill, this was the regular old-time vigilante procedure. So the first matter to attend to

was not the question of Jack's guilt or innocence, but his safety. At any moment Drake and his grizzled old gun-fighters might come swooping down into the valley.

Connie reached her brother's side just as Gary reined the pinto to a halt close before him and his pair of frowning punchers. Like them, Jack had recognized the caller at a distance, and like them, he looked none too well pleased. Even Connie's greeting held no friendly note of welcome. It was both protesting and concerned.

"Gary! You here! I asked you to go away—and stay."

THAT hit Gary so hard he would have liked to turn around and ride off without a word. But he had come to save her brother, not his own feelings. There was no time to waste in talk. He tossed the reins over the pinto's head and swung down to draw open the left side of his coat.

Jack stared at the deputy-sheriff badge pinned to Gary's shirt front.

"Good Lord!" he muttered. "You've finished Lobo! Stolen his star!"

"No. Sheriff Sutton discharged him. He sent me out here to bring you in—on the charge of rustling."

The look of amazement on Jack's face might have been only good acting. Gary had all too often seen guilty men look innocent, and innocent ones look guilty. It was hard to judge by appearances. But the indignant scorn in Connie's voice was unmistakable.

"For shame! How dare you call my brother a—a thief!"

Her scorn cut Gary like a whiplash. Yet he managed to give no sign of how it stung him. He answered her quietly:

"I haven't called him anything. The Sheriff deputized me to bring him in on that charge."

Jack's sullen temper flared. "You've sold out to Vance! Sutton's his man. They've sent you here to get me!"

He turned to Connie, with shame redoubling the heat of his anger. "And I was fool enough to let Vance bunco me again—slick me into helping him soft-sawder you!"

Gary need only have kept his mouth shut. Austell would have fried in his own grease. The man was bad. It would be a crime to let him win Connie. But a silent lie was none the less a lie. Straight talking was as necessary as straight shooting. He made the correction.

"You've scored a double miss, Royd. The Sheriff sent me to take you, not to get you, and he did it on his own play."

"Aw, bah! Sutton has no more sand than a fishworm."

"Sure. That's why he deputized me. But it was all his move—not Austell's."

"You don't say! Where d'you figure he got the gall to plaster me with this lying charge of rustling? If Vance didn't put him up to it, then it's on you—it's your come-back for my firing you."

Though taken by surprise by this counter-charge, which looked to him like a clever attempt to throw up a smoke-screen, Gary kept cool. It never paid to get ruffled.

"No," he replied. "It's all Sutton's play. When he came here after me, he thought you were hiding me out on him. After he left—so he alleges—he circle-rode and found a bunch of corraled stock. The calves had your brand on them, but the horses and cows were all Tonto's."

This time Jack looked both amazed and furious. "Tonto's? It's a bald-faced lie!"

"Yes?" soothed Gary. "Easy enough, then, for you to prove it to a jury. Sooner we start, the better. Sutton went and spilled over to Drake."

"What! When?"

"He streaked straight to the Tonto. This morning I found that Drake had left in the night with his four best shots. I was going in with Sutton so he could collect the reward against me. But he got cold feet over Drake's coming to lynch you. Let's be moving. I ran my horse to get you away before Drake could find his rustled stock and hurry here to pay you for it."

"You're a damned liar!" shouted Jack. "It's a dirty frame-up. You've sold out to Vance."

Gary's friendliness curdled. His quiet coolness froze.

"Hard words break no bones, Royd. But we've had enough talk. I'm acting as the Sheriff's deputy. Get on that horse and come along."

Jack's response was to shuck his gun. The play had been expected by Gary. He took the big automatic from its owner as he had taken Wy's old six-shooter. As he sprang clear he covered the pair of willing but slow-drawing punchers.

"That's it, friends—hands off the hilts.

Sit tight. Now, Royd, I'm going to get you away from here one jump ahead of Drake, if I have to make your men tie you on the horse."

"Oh, no, no!" cried Connie. "You—it's not true! Jack couldn't have done it! If you're honest, you'll stay here with him and make Tonto listen to the truth!"

"He would listen—at your brother's funeral," replied Gary. "Anyway, I'm deputized to take in the accused. How about it, Royd? Do you go with me, or do I take you tied?"

Jack raised his clenched fist. "It's all a hellish frame-up!"

"You—" Gary shoved the pistol muzzle at the two punchers. "Tie him on that horse, or I'll wing you."

"Hold on," Jack interposed. "You've no call to shoot 'em up. I'll go with you."

Gary at once lowered the pistol. As Jack turned to take the horse from the dismounting puncher, Connie gave a quick order to the other man.

"Fetch Jack my roan, Lin. I'm going along on this horse. They sha'n't get Jack off all alone."

"That's fine, Miss Royd," Gary agreed before Jack could speak. "Why not have all your riders come along too?"

The suggestion plainly took her aback. She looked puzzled—perplexed. Then, no doubt, she decided there was some artful catch about his willingness. The man Lin was already hot-footing into the corral. She turned to his mate.

"Call in the other boys. All of you ride out and look for Tonto and his bunch. If you find them, bring them after us. If you don't find them by mid-afternoon, hit our trail hard. Pete, you'll stay here, in case the boys miss Tonto and he comes in ahead of them. If he does, send him after us."

GARY saw Jack's face darken. The young cow-man did not seem as eager as his sister to "meet-up" with Tonto Drake. But he said nothing. As if to cover any betrayal of his thoughts, he bent over and began to unbuckle the sheath that held the rifle on Lin's saddle. Gary interposed.

"Let it stay, Royd. I don't care to load down my horse."

Connie for the first time fixed her attention upon the pinto. He looked far from used-up, but her practised eye saw how hard he had been ridden. She stroked him from forelock to lip.

"A roll would do him good," she said.

Coolly as she spoke, Gary jumped to carry out the suggestion. He had the latigo strap loose from the rings and the saddle off as quickly as Jack himself could have done it. The pinto promptly went down in the dust. He rolled three times while Gary unfolded and shook the sweat-dampened saddle blanket.

The moment the horse lunged to his feet, Gary rubbed the dust off his back and resaddled him. Connie had mounted Lin's horse. Jack sullenly swung up on the big roan bronco led from the corral by Lin. Pete had sprinted to the house. He streaked back to fling a pair of saddlebags over the horn of Connie's saddle and hand her and Jack each a canteen.

The punchers from the dam came hastening to saddle up. They passed Gary with none too friendly looks. He kept his eye on them as he made a sign for Jack to start off ahead of him. Connie rode forward beside her brother and had him turn down to the edge of the water-hole.

She called back to Gary in that same cool tone: "Your horse needs water. But let him have only half a drink."

Given the reins by Gary, the pinto floundered out knee-deep and plunged his dusty muzzle into the water. Gary pulled his head up when he saw Connie and Jack spur their broncos away from the edge of the reservoir.

He would have started the pinto off at a gallop. Any moment now he expected to see Drake and his men come racing to head them off, or to hear the crack of their rifles. But all his urgings failed to make Jack and Connie quicken their broncos out of a slow trot.

To his vast relief, he saw no sign of any Tonto man, even when he followed his leisurely leaders up over the rise above the valley. A backward look showed the Box R punchers streaking out from the ranch in five different directions. But of the Tonto riders no trace was to be seen anywhere around the little valley or ahead along the trail.

Jack flung back a jeer over his shoulder: "Lost, strayed or stolen, one bunch of vigilantes."

"Don't crow till you're out of the woods," Gary replied.

Connie cast a startled glance back at him, then peered off to the west, and quickened the pace to a lope. Gary began to breathe a bit easier. But he did not

feel fully relieved until, after miles of steady loping, they at last reached the mesa cleft and made the descent without running into any ambush.

Once down upon the lower desert, he felt almost certain they must have put Drake and his bunch behind them. That would mean safety. The broncos ridden by Jack and Connie were fresh. The pinto may have traveled a few miles farther than the Tonto horses, but their going had been across very rough country. He could still outrun the best of them.

When a brief stop was made at the first slough to let the horses wet their nostrils in the shallow little puddle of the drying-up hole, Gary could not help expressing his relief that he had brought Jack safe away before Drake could strike. The fact won him no word of thanks nor look of gratitude even from Connie.

Her brother was more than ever sarcastic. "Still trying to string us with that bull con, are you? I'll give you ten to one odds, old Tonto hasn't stirred off his home range."

"I'd be glad to make the bet if I felt sure I'd lose," said Gary.

"Four-flush," sneered Jack. "What's the use of lying? You've got me. Come clean. It's all a frame-up. Even a fellow like you can't have gall enough to stick to such a lie."

Gary turned to Connie only to see the same certainty of his double-dealing in her coldly reproachful eyes. What was the use of mere denials? They had made up their minds not to believe him.

"Think what you like," he said. "Your Sheriff deputized me to take you. Talk all you want, but make no breaks. I'm going to bring you in."

"Dead or alive!" Jack got in another jab of the gaff.

"Yes?" Gary looked around at the back trail. "Well, so far, you've done your best to make it dead."

The fairness of Connie's nature compelled her to concede the truth of this claim.

"That's so, Jack. You've done enough to have given a deputy like Lobo Leet excuse to shoot you—twice over!"

"Which proves this city killer hasn't the nerve."

"Quite right," agreed Gary. "Also I lack the nerve to loaf here, with Tonto Drake, likely as not, on our trail. Push along *pronto*."

Connie possessed plenty of determination but none of her brother's bull-headed obstinacy. She could at least consider the possibility of being mistaken.

"Wait," she said. "If it's really true Tonto went to lynch Jack, might he not have suspected this interference by Mr. Sutton and sent men to block the trail near the forks?"

The shrewdness of the suggestion added not a little to Gary's high estimate of the girl's intelligence.

"You're right, Miss Royd. Old Bill told me that in the Tonto Basin war Drake never lost a trick. He outfoxed everyone till they bunched together and bought him out. We'd better side-step the forks. Austell's bunch would have got me at the butte or east of it, only I swung off to the Tonto."

Another gibe from Jack was forestalled by Connie. "You can't mean to claim that Vance Austell tried to dry-gulch you! It was only his discharged riders attempting to take you for the reward."

Gary showed the second set of bullet holes in his hat.

"Have it your own way. Only, whether they were operating for him or for themselves, they seemed to prefer collecting the reward on my corpse. But that's neither here nor there. The point now is that I don't want trouble with Austell, yet I can't let your brother chance a meeting with Drake's men. If you say so, we'll cut straight for the Hat-on."

"I savvy," put in Jack. "You've sold out to Vance, and his man Sutton is having you steer me into their noose. But Connie's coming along has got you guessing what to do."

"What a mind-reader you'd make!" said Gary. "Suppose I leave it to your sister to choose which way to head? The only condition is that we'll not turn back. I undertook to deliver you to the Sheriff, and I will do just that."

Once more Connie interposed: "We'll try to sift through, midway between the buttes. Let's go."

CHAPTER XX

A FEW miles more of the slow but steady loping brought the three up a long rise in the desert. Connie halted her horse just below the crest and dismounted. Jack swung off beside her. To the southeast



"Here's Lobo's star. I hereby deputize you to go and bring in Jack Royd."

and southwest Gary saw distant pine trees above the skyline of the rise. They were the tree-tops on the butte beside the trail and the one at the Hat-on ranch. The buttes appeared to be about the same distance away.

Jack and Connie were drinking from their canteens. Jack started to wet the nostrils of their broncos. Gary followed suit with the pinto. When he turned around, Connie was taking food from her saddlebags. She offered him a slice of the boiled ham and a chunk of the cake that Pete had flung into the bags.

The bitterness that had ridden with Gary rose into his mouth. He felt that the mere taste of Box R food would choke him. "No, thank you, Miss Royd. I'm not hungry."

"Don't be silly," she replied. "There's more here than Jack and I can eat."

"Then give it to your broncos. They are not slick sneaky city gunmen."

The shot hit. Connie flushed scarlet. Tears gushed into her eyes.

"Say," growled Jack, "what the heck—" He scowled at Gary. "If you've got fresh with her, throw your guns and be damned. I'm going to bust you wide open."

"No—no, Jack!" Connie clutched his arm. "Don't! It's my fault."

"It's not," denied Gary. "You have the right to look down on me. I'm exactly what you labeled me—a professional gunman."

"Then you own up to it?" put in Jack. "You're a killer."

"That does not follow. There's more than one kind of gunman."

The look in Connie's eyes cleared and she managed an uncertain smile.

"Wont you please join us, Mr. Owen?"

Put that way, Gary could not refuse the invitation. As he took the food from her, their fingers touched. He felt his face flame hot with mortification at his clumsiness. Her face also flushed deeply. No doubt he had angered her again.

But he sat down on his heels, cowboy fashion, to force himself to eat. As Connie also sat down, she spoke in an oddly gay tone:

"You see, it's as well to give the horses a few minutes' rest. If Tonto is waiting to head us off, we may have a run for our money. Do you think you can stay on?"

Gary pulled a long face. "If I don't, I hereby name you as my posse to take over the custody of my prisoner and deliver him to Sheriff Sutton."

The absurdity of this drew a grin from Jack. But Connie took it seriously. "I'll deliver him, Mr. Owen. The best way to meet a false charge is to face it squarely and prove it a lie."

"Yes, Miss Royd. That's why I'm going back to Chicago. You've had no letters about me?"

"Why, no. We haven't been in for mail since I came home. What was it?"

"I've been waiting for—but we'll let that ride. I know now it would make no difference. You two will get off at the county seat. I'll go straight on through."

The remark gave Jack an opening for a jab. "Glad to hear you've at last decided to go straight."

"How about yourself?" asked Gary. "This rustling charge may be a frame-up, as you claim. But you've owned up that you've been a gambling fool, in spite of the fact that you have a sister worth crawling on your knees to be good to."

It was Jack's turn to flush. He muttered rather lamely: "Well, anyhow, I—nobody ever heard me brag of stacking a poker-deck."

"Oh, Jack!" remonstrated Connie. "To drag that up, when he did it all for you!"

HER brother flung away what was left of his cake and rose to catch his grazing horse. He was rounding the crest of the rise before the sprinting bronco and pinto overtook his spurred roan.

"Keep to the left," called Connie. "Hold down in the draw."

"Aw, forget it!" her brother shouted back. "That Tonto dope is all bunk."

He held on, straight over the bald crest of the desert swell. Gary, following close after Connie, caught a tiny flash, or glitter, on the brink of the trail-butte rimrock.

"What's that light on the butte?" he asked.

Even as he spoke, the glittering point blinked on and off again. Other quick flashes followed.

"Oh!" cried Connie. "It's some one on the butte. He must have seen us with field-glasses. He's signaling with a mirror!"

Jack turned in his saddle to scowl at Gary.

"That clinches it. You tricked me away from my men to steer me into this trap."

As Gary sprinted the pinto past Connie's horse, he kept his gaze on the butte crest. He could not face the scorn he felt sure was blazing at him from the girl's eyes. He held out Jack's forty-five automatic to him.

"Here you are, Royd, and get the rifle from Miss Connie. If I get thrown or can't keep up with you, drop the rifle. I'll try to hold them back."

"Like hell you will!" Jack whirled the pistol around with its big muzzle toward Gary. "Line out! Try to drop behind, and you'll get plugged."

No use arguing with a stubborn bonehead! A touch of Gary's heels sent the pinto striding into the lead. He kept it until Connie spurred her bronco up alongside him. The rifle boot was empty. The girl's gaze was searching the desert ahead and to the right.

She did not look at Gary.

"Follow me," she directed. "Watch out for side-jumps and gullies."

Gary pulled the overwilling pinto just enough to fall in behind the bronco. He did not look back to see if Jack still had him covered. All his attention was needed to keep himself in the saddle. Connie appeared to be in quite a bit of a hurry. The pace she set was not a sprint, but it was faster than any except the best of horses could hold up under for a long-distance race.

Though Gary had ridden faster, it had been only on fairly smooth ground. The desert between the two buttes offered, as he remembered, not much choice of route. None of it was very rough, and none very level. Connie must have known the fact. She headed for the railroad on a beeline midway of the buttes.

The girl swerved out of the straight course only to round the ends of the higher rock combs or to cross arroyos where the banks were climbable. All the small gullies she took on the jump. Luckily for Gary, he had learned at the Tonto ranch how to stick on a leaping horse, as well as a crow-hopper. He now had only to balance himself forward and back. The pinto did the rest.

More than a mile of dust spurted behind the swift-pounding hoofs of the horses before a fairly level stretch let Gary venture to look away from the ground close ahead. The thud of hoofs back of him suddenly stopped. He glanced over his shoulder. Jack had jumped from the roan and was swinging up his rifle.

Gary jerked his gaze around to the direction the rifle was pointing. Half a mile off to the right front a horseman was racing across from the direction of the trail. He evidently intended to cut in ahead of the fugitives and hold them from behind one of the rocky ridges.

At Jack's second shot the horse pitched headlong, flinging his rider ahead of him. If the man moved, he did so under cover of the greasewood bushes into which he had been hurled.

Another crack of the rifle shifted Gary's

gaze to a second horseman who had raced up over a rise a quarter-mile farther to the right. Neither horse nor rider fell, but they swung off westward and dipped out of sight.

Connie veered her course a little to the left. All the ground ahead was rougher. It forced the hard-running horses down to a lope. Though the line between the two buttes had now been crossed, Gary saw the girl continue to cast anxious glances off toward the trail. Yet a long two miles of slow going were covered, with no further sign of enemies.

The broken ground smoothed out on a wide grass-flat. Gary drew a deep breath. It looked as if they had already distanced even the rider turned by Jack's last shot. Neither the pinto nor either of the broncos showed signs of giving out, and here was easy going.

GARY'S relief was short-lived. Just after Connie jumped the lope into a gallop, a flock of bullets kicked up the dust between Gary and Jack and behind Jack. A moment later other bullets struck ahead of Gary. The dry-gulchers were fast getting the range. A bullet glanced from the steel shank of Gary's saddlehorn. He heard Jack's horse snort and plunge. Then, abruptly, the shooting stopped.

Connie had whirled her bronco in a short circle that brought him alongside the pinto. Her brother's horse, scorched across the rump by a bullet, had sprinted forward to pass the pinto on the left side. Connie was racing along in line between them and the hidden dry-gulchers.

Every bullet had carried a message that the killers were close enough to distinguish between the three fugitives. Not one of all the shots had been aimed at Connie. Her quick-witted maneuver proved the fact and balked the killers. They could not shoot at either Jack or Gary without danger of hitting her. No more bullets snapped their whiplash crack across the flat desert.

But the thought of shielding himself behind a girl was more than Gary could stand. He dug his heels into the pinto's flanks just as Jack was forging out ahead. But with the pinto's leap to top speed Connie's bronco also jumped into a sprint. The three horses raced for nearly a quarter of a mile, with Jack and Gary never more than a length apart, and Connie very slowly falling to the rear.

At last Connie cried out for an easing of the mad rush. "Slow down—slow down! My horse is beginning to blow."

Gary did not obey until he had streaked ahead far enough to be well clear of both his companions. But the bullets he expected failed to arrive. He did not even hear any shots. A glance over his shoulder told him the reason.

Four horsemen were slanting across from the rocky ridge behind whose crest the shots had been fired. Connie, though several lengths to the rear, had swung out to the right. That kept her still too close in line with Jack and Gary for the galloping pursuers to risk any shots.

Farther back, beyond long rifle range, appeared the moving dots of two more pursuers, in line with the trail butte. Quite near to the right and a little ahead, the hat of still another rider kept rising into view and sinking out of sight. This seventh man probably was the one who had swerved off when Jack dropped the horse of the gang's foremost rider.

The cautious stalker was racing behind a low land-swell in an attempt to head the fugitives. He was already within close enough range to have jumped off his horse and shot both Jack and Gary before Connie could have come up between. But he lacked either heart or head for the venture.

Jack must have had his eye on the skulker. His chance came within the next mile. The low ridge, or swell, flattened down. Jack began to fire across at the exposed rider, holding his rifle butt at his left shoulder. This, together with the fact that his horse was tearing along at full gallop, made the shooting doubly awkward. His very first shots, however, must have come uncomfortably close to their mark. The rider suddenly shunted off to the west.

"Bueno!" shouted Jack. "Hey, Owen, ease down. We've got 'em strung out."

As Gary obeyed the command, Connie once more took the lead. But her brother still held his position behind Gary. His belief that Gary had drawn him into the ambush evidently had not lessened.

Gary now had time to think twice of the accusation, and he realized that, from Jack's point of view, the charge must appear to be well based. He had been staying with Tonto Drake. Bill had given many instances to prove that his boss was as foxy as he was ruthless. Might not Drake and Sutton have connived the scheme to send the Eastern gunman for Jack? In case of a lynching, that would let

out the Sheriff. At the same time it would win him the backing of Drake by giving Drake the chance to vigilante Jack, off away from his outfit.

In any event, whatever were the facts behind this attack, it must already have succeeded had not Connie come along with her brother. So far, she had saved him and Gary also. But the railroad was still at least twelve miles away.

CHAPTER XXI

BY the time the off-sheering rider on the flank found shelter behind which he could race forward again, he was too far off on the side and rear to give Connie any further concern. Small danger now of his being able to get into the lead.

The girl had already gauged the speed of the foremost pursuers. She set a pace only just fast enough to keep them from gaining. This was what Gary had done when running before his two pursuers on the trail to the Tonto. For Connie to do the same thing seemed to him to show that he had guessed at good horsemanship as well as good strategy.

Before the long and grueling chase had covered half the remaining distance to the railroad, the two leading pursuers were well in advance of their fellows. They began to gain on the fugitives whenever the going became rough. At such places Connie had to slacken the pace. The fresher horses of the pursuers took the ridges and arroyos with slight check.

At last, starting up a higher ridge, Connie's bronco slowed to a walk. He was blowing hard. As Gary and Jack drew rein alongside her, Connie made a desperate gesture for them to ride on.

"Don't stop! Your rifle, Jack! Hurry —hurry! Keep going! I'll hold them long as I can!"

"That's my play," differed Gary. "You'll take my pinto."

Jack met this with a jeer. "We savvy. You want to alibi yourself. Think you'll drop out of the party before they get the rope on me. No go. You'll shove along with Connie. Only three shots left in my rifle, but I'll put 'em where they'll do the most good."

The three horses slanted up the ridge at a walk. As they crossed the rocky top, Gary looked back and saw that the foremost pursuers had already gained a great deal more. But Connie did not try to urge her bronco out of his slow walk. The beast could go no faster until he had regained his wind.

Down behind the crest ledges, Jack slipped off and crept back to peer over the top. Gary kept on with Connie. His turn would soon come. At the next ridge he would make Connie change horses with him.

Though the pinto had covered all those additional miles from the Tonto to the Box R, he still had more left in him than had the short-winded bronco. Jack's roan also looked comparatively fresh. He and the pinto could carry their riders to the railroad, if given a little more leeway in addition to what Jack was apt to gain by his three shots. The play would be to lie close and wait for the bunch to come within pistol range.

The still walking horses had covered little more than a hundred paces down the ridge slope when Jack fired his first shot. A moment later he fired again. Then, after a brief pause, he swung upon the roan and jogged him down the slope. The whine of a ricocheted bullet told that shots were being aimed at the crest ledge over which Jack had fired.

When he came down alongside his sister, his dark face showed no sign of elation. He muttered discontentedly: "Hate to shoot horses. Got to think of you, though. No telling what Tonto would do if I drilled his old peelers."

"Oh, good!" cried Connie. "You only set them afoot. They can't brand you a killer!"

"What of it? I'll be just as dead if they string me up for only that lying charge of rustling. There were just the two shots left. I'm done."

"No. A little more, and this give-out bronc' will catch his second wind."

To keep dragging along, while certain that all the pursuers still mounted must be gaining at a gallop, took real courage. Connie did not quicken the bronco out of his slow walk until the down-slope of the ridge began to level off on a wide flat. Even then she only put him into a fox-trot. Yet either by chance or from shrewd calculation on her part, the ridge-top lay a good quarter-mile to the rear when the pursuers burst up over the crest.

Jack's sullen lips crooked in a grin.

"Say, ol' gal, that don't look so worse. They've picked up my pair of hoof-dusters.

If the bunch tries another rush, the two bronc's packing double are bound to drag."

"Let's ride!" said Connie.

Her horse had quit heaving and blowing. He slid readily into a lope. The pinto and roan also had been freshened by their rest. The pursuers trotted their horses down the steepest part of the ridge-slope, then put them into a fast gallop.



"Royd, I'm going to get you away from here if I have to tie you on the horse."

Connie scanned the ground ahead, changed the course slightly to the left, and urged her bronco into a run. The race for life was again tautened up to top speed. Gary had ceased to wonder whether the horses could hold out. He was beginning to doubt whether he himself could stay much longer. Except for the short stop at the Box R ranch and the other stop for lunch, he had been in his saddle since sunrise. The last of his newly regained strength was oozing out of him.

Yet somehow he continued to stick on the pinto, and somehow all three horses continued to pound along over the desert. At last Connie headed up the draw approach to a low saddle in a ridge that shut off all view to the south.

Gary felt himself almost done. A backward glance showed him the pursuers now strung out in line, with the foremost rather nearer than they had been for some time. He decided that the ridge-saddle was his limit. He would stop in the little pass and block it as long as he could. That would make sure of Connie and Jack reaching the railroad.

THE three of them urged their fast-tiring horses up the easy slope. As they began to top the saddle, Gary pulled the pinto enough to drop into the rear position. Jack did not heed the move. Like Connie, he was peering intently ahead. Gary glanced back again. To his great surprise, he saw that the foremost pursuers had slackened down to a lope.

He turned to call out the good news to Connie. Past Jack's shoulder he glimpsed the red top of the railroad water-tank, over the round of the ridge saddle. Two more strides of the pinto brought a full view of the railroad and little station, the corral and loading-chute, and the big adobe store. All looked very close, but Gary had now been long enough in Arizona to realize they were a full mile away.

Jack looked back at the pursuers, and sang out to Connie. She at once moderated the hard gallop to a lope. The pinto shifted to his single-footing gait. To Gary it seemed almost as smooth as floating. He decided he could manage to keep going and that his companions could make the railroad without need of his blocking the pass.

Yet even with the easier riding, that last mile in was mostly a blur to him. His exhausted mind did not clear until the little red station seemed suddenly to spring up before him out of a mist. He heard Jack shout to Connie:

"That's the ticket, ol' gal! Hop to it! Wire 'em all—everyone we can count on. Tell 'em to hitch the switch engine to an empty and come a-running. Never mind if

Sutton horns in on the party. They'll be his posse."

Connie was spurring her horse straight ahead toward the station. Jack started to crowd the pinto to the left.

"Here's your chance to show if you're a white man or a yellow-streaked skunk," he challenged. "They're still coming. All the same, the two of us might hold off the bunch till Connie's wires bring help."

"Yes—old fort," Gary jerked out his reply. "Unless Lobo—bars us out."

"Hit for the front door," ordered Jack shortly.

He angled toward the corral gate at the rear of the big adobe. Gary swung the pinto around the front corner and halted before the door. He was so outspent that he fell as he slid down from his saddle. But he managed to stagger to his feet.

The heavy door was closed but not locked. Gary half opened it and peered in around the edge. No shot blazed at him from the cool interior. He made out the bottles on the old mahogany bar, and tottered in toward them, one hand on a pistol hilt. Still no sign of Lobo Leet, ex-deputy-sheriff.

He knocked the neck off a bottle of ginger ale and gulped down the fizzy contents. That gave him strength enough to get back to the door. As he started to shut it, the sound of a heavy footstep whirled him face about, ready to shoot. It was Jack, not Lobo.

Gary thrust his pistols into their holster pockets and wilted down. "All in, Royd! Bar the door."

Jack's suspicious eyes cleared.

"Bar it yourself," he replied. "I'm going to lead your pinto round to feed and water. He's earned it."

That brought Gary to his feet. Jack had slipped in upon him from the rear door to see what treachery he was up to. Now Jack was going out in front, well aware that the man he had mistrusted need only bar the rear door as well as the front one to lock him out where he could not escape from the gang. This reliance on his good faith was more refreshing to Gary than many bottles of ginger ale.

Before shoving the door shut, he looked out and saw the pursuers only a few hundred yards away. They were riding straight toward the store. All of them began to fire. But no bullets struck in or near the doorway.

Gary guessed that the vigilantes were shooting at Jack. He barred the door and staggered across to clamber up on a barrel. From it he peered out through one of the high narrow loopholes. Neither Jack nor the pinto were in sight. Gary went reeling and tottering into the bunk-room. Its side door opened upon a big messy kitchen, from which the rear door of the old-time fort-saloon-store gave out into the private corral.

Through the wide-open doorway Gary saw Jack stripping the saddle off the pinto. The bridleless head of the tired thoroughbred rose from a bucket with muzzle wet but not dripping. Beyond the pinto and Jack's sag-headed roan a pair of Lobo Leet's broncos stood beside the hay-filled feed-racks.

Jack came in to dump Gary's saddle atop his own, on the kitchen floor, and to eye Gary with a reckless half-derisive grin.

"Aint I the gambling fool! Need only to've hit out on one of those fresh bronc's to make my get-away; yet here I am staking my neck that you'll play square."

"A sure-thing bet is no gamble, Royd. How about a jolt of hooch? I'd rather have coffee, but time's too short."

Jack reached a bottle from a blind closet. Three fingers of the liquid fire lifted Gary out of his collapse. He streaked back into the store, leaving Jack to bar the rear entrance. He was greeted by two steel-jacketed bullets that shattered through the thick oak door like tiny bombs.

Keeping out of the line of fire, he ran forward to jump on a box and peer through the loophole beside the door. A little spurt of dirt told of a bullet striking the edge of the hole at the outer face of the three-foot adobe wall. Gary wiped his eyes and looked out again.

HE caught a fleeting glimpse of riders masked with neckerchiefs. They were circling to right and left. The shots came from behind low-growing thorn scrubs just beyond pistol-range. The two last men dismounted by Jack evidently had dropped off from behind the riders who had brought them in. They were covering the front of the store while the rest of the gang sought to rush the rear.

Gary shifted to a loophole in the end of the store. From it he saw no riders. But a kerchief-masked man was driving Connie and the station-agent around from the front of the little station at the muzzle of his pistol. The vigilantes were missing

no bets. The station-agent could hardly have had time to more than begin wiring Connie's telegrams for help.

The vigilante started to rope his captives to a hitching-post. Gary was not sure that his thirty-eights would carry true at so long a range, and the tying showed that no harm was meant to Connie, at least for the time being. He did not fire at the roper.

An outburst of shots and yells at the rear of the store sent him hastening back to the kitchen. Jack stood upon the table, beside a loophole, his big forty-five automatic in one hand and the whisky bottle in the other. He took a swig of the raw moonshine, and grinned.

"Got one of the dirty coyotes," he said. "The *bobos* thought they'd stampede the hawses. They've another guess coming."

"And no chance of them breaking into this old fort, I'd say," replied Gary. "Here, give me another jolt of that hooch."

As he held up his hand for the bottle, a second burst of rifle bullets splintered through the rear door. Jack turned to peer from the loophole. Gary let the bottle slip past his hand. It smashed on the floor. Jack jerked around and cursed. Gary was scrambling up on the table, a pistol in each hand.

"Forget it," he said. "Just as well the bottle dropped. Hooch doesn't help straight shooting. Did you see any of the gang close to?"

"A pair of 'em—both masked. The one I dropped crawled off. But you win. His hawse is there beside ours. He carried the Tonto brand. Vance isn't in on this."

"Well, I'm not so sure as I was," differed Gary. "Drake didn't strike me as a man who'd do his killing behind a mask. Another thing—Miss Connie doesn't know how to telegraph, does she?"

"No."

"Then why should a Tonto man tie her up, along with the agent, out on this side of the station where we can see her?"

Jack's face darkened. "He did? Lord! I never took Tonto for that kind of a skunk. Watch the scoundrels while I look for Lobo's rifle."

"Wait," said Gary, his eyes at the loophole. "My guess is his rifle's out there. Look at the stringy guy giving out orders, over in the big corral. Carries his right arm inside his shirt. That's the arm I broke at Curlew Slough."

"What?" Jack took a look through the narrow slit. "You're right. The one afoot—that's Lobo. Couldn't mistake those longhorn legs of his. Only how come he's with Tonto? All during the round-up that squint-eyed red devil kept throwing up how you'd bitten the forelegs of Vance's two-gun wolf."

"He did? Royd, there's something crooked in this deal. Tonto horses, but all the gang masked, and Lobo Leet bossing the operations. I begin to believe—"

"Stow it," broke in Jack. "Something's coming off around in front. May be going to ram the door. Hop to it!"

Gary's quick leap from the table was followed by the heavier thud of Jack's down-jump.

CHAPTER XXII

AS Gary and Jack dashed through the bunk-room into the store, both held their pistols ready to fire. But the heavy front door had not been burst in. Its bar still held fast. Though the thick oak planks showed many bullet-holes, they gave out no thudding such as would have been made by the smashes of a log battering-ram.

A look through front loopholes showed four of the besiegers lined up, out beyond pistol shot. But their backs were to the old fort-store. Still farther out, six riders, rifles in hand, were slanting across toward the station. None of them had their faces masked.

"Vance!" exclaimed Jack. "I called the wrong card, Owen. He's come to ask why-for the necktie-party. Look, he's spotted Connie."

Five of the riders suddenly swung off behind their horses to level their rifles at the four masked men. Their boss sprinted his horse ahead to the station.

Jack and Gary shifted to end-wall loopholes in time to see Austell leap from his horse in a flying dismount. Pistol to pistol, he confronted the masked man who had tied up Connie and the station-agent. After what looked like an exchange of threats, the two appeared to reach some kind of agreement. Both holstered their pistols, and the masked man backed off a few steps. Austell then hastened to untie Connie.

With the girl walking between them, the two men started straight across toward the store. Jack growled a curse and lifted his pistol, ready to shoot.

"Hold on," said Gary. "Miss Connie is waving her handkerchief. They're coming to talk."

"I'll talk to that Tonto sneak with lead," muttered Jack.

But he did not shoot, even when the three came within close pistol-range. The masked man had discreetly dropped back behind Connie. The party disappeared around the corner of the store.

When Gary and Jack shifted to front loopholes, they found the three callers before the door, the masked man still back of Connie. Austell stood side by side with the girl, his look no less anxious than hers.

"Hey, Jack," he sang out. "You there?"

"Sitting pretty," replied Jack. "What's doing?"

Austell indicated the masked man with a jerk of his thumb.

"Looks like trouble, buddy. Wy saw them shoving you toward the rails. He hit for the ranch to tell me. I picked up all my boys within reach and came to ask how-come. This Tonto peeler claims you collected a bunch of their calves and bronc's."

"It's a dirty lie," shouted Jack. "I've rustled no Tonto stock."

THE masked man pulled his hat-brim low and let down his neckerchief enough below his nose to yell back threateningly: "You're the liar, Royd. Sheriff hisself found the boss' calves an' hawses you rustled. Tonto went an' seen the calves. You switched the hawses 'fore he got there."

"I'll talk to no sneak who's afraid to show his face," Jack countered. "Where's Tonto? Try to frame me, will he? I want to tell him he's a cross between a rattler and a hydrophobia skunk."

The masked man appeared to hesitate. Then, as Austell turned to stare at him, he yelled louder than before:

"Jest you wait, yuh hawse-thief! Tonto's trailing them rustled bronc's. Soon's he gets here, we'll dynamite yuh out yore hole an' string you up to a telegraph pole, 'longside yore dude desperado."

Gary saw his chance to cut in.

"We'll be delighted to see Mr. Drake. While waiting for his arrival, you might go around and tell Lobo Leet I'm wearing the star that Sheriff Sutton took away from him and gave to me as a special deputy."

The look of concern on Austell's handsome face suddenly vanished in a red flare of anger.

"That's another lie," he charged. "Sutton's not fool enough to trust a killer he went to arrest. Where is he? Why didn't he go with you to take Royd? You can't answer that, because you've murdered him! You shot him down in cold blood when he was fetching you from the Tonto ranch."

"You bungling tinhorn!" called back Gary. "Can't slip a card out of your sleeve without fumbling it. You've spilled your game. How did you know Sutton sent me to take Royd? You can't prove it. You've shown yourself up as a liar."

As Gary had calculated, rage so blinded Austell that he stumbled into the trap.

"You slick killer! Can't prove it, can't I? Sutton told me, himself—uh—uh—I mean, he—"

"Yes," broke in Gary, "he reported it to you at the trail butte, where you were laying for me—where you left your masked men waiting to get both me and Royd."

Austell dodged behind Connie barely in time to miss the bullet from Jack's roaring forty-five. He crouched back of the girl, gripping her fast by the elbows. The masked man crouched in line directly behind him.

"You skulking coyote!" Jack yelled out at him. "Stand clear and take your medicine, you yellow-streaked coward!"

"Yes, I will!" flung back Austell. "Must think I'm a crazy fool—like yourself. Here I try to pull you out of a bad hole, and you crack down on me at the word of a city killer."

"At your own bean-spilling," corrected Jack. "You let out you talked with Sutton, after you said Owen had killed Sutton!"

"No. I saw Sutton before—on his way to the Tonto to take Owen—after he missed him at your ranch."

Gary cut in again: "You didn't see him then—else he'd have told you about his finding rustled stock on Royd's home range. You didn't meet him then, and he didn't tell you anything. I know he didn't. He didn't say a word to me about meeting you."

"Why should he, you alley sneak?"

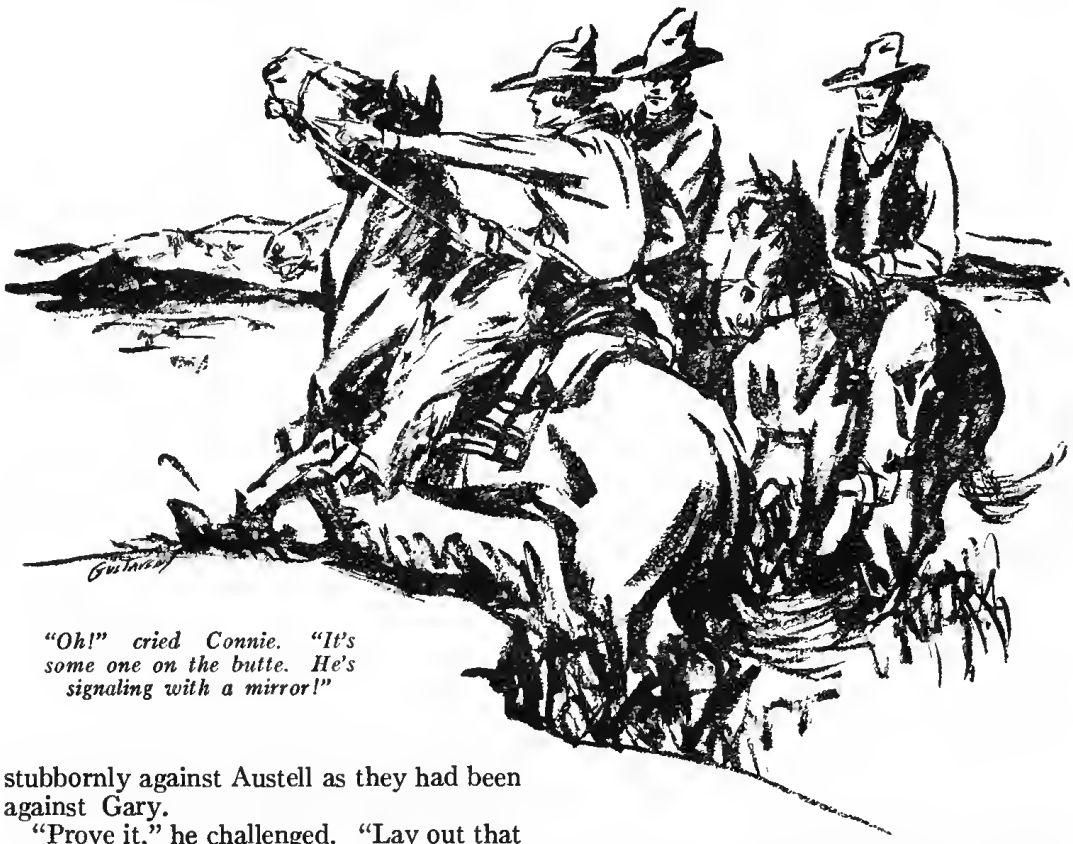
"But why shouldn't you go out yourself to warn Royd against Drake? You've been claiming to be Royd's best friend."

Austell was too clever to be caught twice in the same way.

"I'll answer *you* with a rope! —Jack, you can't have gone plumb loco. Here's a bigger bunch of Tontos—more men than I've

got with me. They're itching to string you up with Sutton's murderer. They claim that Drake and the rest of his peelers are heading in. I can't stand off the whole outfit! Turn your gun on that alley rat, and I'll fix these Tontos before the old killer gets here."

But Jack's suspicions were now fixed as stubbornly against Austell as they had been against Gary.



"Oh!" cried Connie. "It's some one on the butte. He's signaling with a mirror!"

"Prove it," he challenged. "Lay out that sneak behind you and send Connie to untie the agent. A wire will get Sutton and a posse here before Tonto can clean us up."

Connie found a chance to give out a bit of encouraging news:

"There'll be a posse coming, with or without Mr. Sutton. Winton managed to wire my first message before we were held up by this man."

AUSTELL let go of Connie to twist half about and cover the puncher behind him with his pistol. The fellow threw up his hands.

"All right now, Jack," Vance called. "I wont let Connie risk the run to the station. Open the door. I'll slide in with my boys. We can easily hold off Drake till the posse comes."

A way to outfox the schemer and get Connie safe inside flashed upon Gary. But his call to her brother passed unheeded. Jack was already shouting his derision.

"Bah! Think I'd fall for that bunk? If you couldn't outshoot us yourself, you'd send a man through to let Lobo in at the back door."

That was the limit for Austell. He gave over his pretense of holding up the masked man, and faced front again to level his pistol over Connie's slender shoulder.

"You *bobo!*" he shouted. "Here I'm risking my life to hold the bunch off you, yet you turn me down cold—you try your best to shoot me. I'm through! I quit!"

"Just what I thought you were—a yellow quitter!" gibed Jack.

This last jab stung Austell into showing his hand. He fired through Jack's loophole. The bullet flipped off Jack's back-pushed hat. It would have drilled his forehead if he had not been crouched to peer along the barrel of his pistol.

As Gary looked to see if Jack had been hit, a screaming bullet ricocheted in at his own loophole. A hasty glimpse showed the upraised hand and pistol of the man behind Austell. Gary's snap shot in return

shattered the pistol butt and the hand that grasped it. With a howl, the man leaped up and started to run, only to pitch upon his face, shot in the leg by Jack.

BULLETS from Austell's automatic came flying back through the loopholes. The fight was on in deadly earnest. Yet even when Austell stopped to reload, he kept so close behind Connie that neither Jack nor Gary dared fire at him. Gary could have put any number of shots into a dollar circle at the distance. But his nerve failed him when it came to the risk of shooting so close to Connie's head.

The wounded man had scrambled up and was hopping away in wild haste to get beyond pistol-range. The other masked men and the five Hat-on punchers had given over their pretense of mutual hostility. All were bunching together, with rifles pointed at the store.

In the blank hush that followed his burst of fire, Austell called out from behind the terrified girl: "Damn you, Jack! Hope that got you and your killer sidekick, you calf-rustling horse-thief!"

Jack choked with rage, but Gary said it for him: "How nice that sounds from a perfect gent protecting a lady!"

"I'll be protecting her long after *you* are buzzard meat," replied Austell. "You too, Jack, if she doesn't come through! She'll agree right here and now to marry me, or I pull out and leave you to the bunch, along with your city killer."

"Oh-h!" gasped Connie. "Oh, no, no! You can't—not either of them! Oh, please!"

Austell's already angry voice shook with jealous fury. "Hell! So that's it? You've fallen for the killer dude. That cinches it! I'm going to have you, or I'll make sure both of them get the rope. I'll help dig out the pair, then leave them to Drake's peelers. There'll be no questions asked. Owen is wanted for murder, and Drake has a dead open-and-shut case on Jack for that rustling."

Connie threw up her hands before her eyes. She cried out in an agony of despair: "You—oh, you—devil!"

"All right, anything you've a mind to call me, girl. I'm willing to go to hell to get you. Only don't forget I always get what I go for."

"Connie," shouted Jack, "throw yourself! Drop down—down!"

The move would have left Austell exposed. But even if Connie could have rallied enough from the paralysis of her dread and terror to have attempted to drop down, she could not have wrenched herself out of Austell's powerful grasp.

The failure of the stratagem transmuted the jealous rage of her captor into sneering derision.

"Another trick misplayed, buddy," he mocked. "Me—I've got the stakes. Heads I win; tails you lose. What I get, I hold. She's going to marry me. To double-cinch the bargain, she's going with me now. Only difference, if she accepts my ring and goes willingly, I call off my lobos. If she doesn't, I take her along anyway, and leave the pack to finish the job."

"No! Oh, no!" cried Connie. "Don't—don't let them. . . . . I—I'll agree to—"

"You'll not!" shouted Jack. "If he takes you, promise or no promise, I'll kill him on sight, first chance I get."

"That's enough, you horse-thief," replied Austell. "I'd have backed you against Tonto and the law. Now you'll get what you've asked for. Here goes."

He lifted Connie just enough to back off with her. Within a few steps he stumbled against a clump of prickly pears, but managed to sidle around it without once exposing himself to Gary's leveled pistol.

The slam of the heavy door-bar jerked Gary's gaze sideways. Jack had jumped down from the loophole on the other side of the door. He was heaving the door open. As he lunged past it, Gary grasped his arm. But Jack wrenched free with a violence that slammed Gary hard against the door jamb.

Before Gary could recover enough from the shock to make another clutch, Jack jumped out sideways to rush after Austell. A flight of bullets thudded into the three-foot thickness of the adobe wall. Jack had crouched to leap the old hitch-rail. He spun around in the air. He was pitching on his face before the roar of the rifles reached Gary's ears.

More bullets thudded into the wall. Others flung up sand in Gary's face as he made his rush for Jack. His jumps from side to side spoiled the aim of the riflemen. But during the much longer time it took to drag Jack back to the doorway, sheer luck alone saved him—unless the frantic screams of Connie helped by shaking the nerve of the bunched gang.

The hail of bullets struck all around Gary, pierced his clothes, fanned his face. Yet somehow he managed to drag his help-

less burden clear into the old building and to one side of the doorway.

One of the bullets that pierced the oak planks as he heaved the door shut drove a splinter into his right arm. He jammed the bar fast in its socket and sprang clear to tear the oak splinter out of his flesh.

Bullets continued to smash through the door and thud into the adobe wall. As Gary climbed on his barrel stand, an inspraying spurt of dust and grit told that a bullet had angled into the loophole. Though others might follow at any moment, Gary peered out.

Two of the Hat-on men, each with a horse in lead, were riding to meet Austell and Connie. Austell, already beyond pistol-range, was dragging the girl along beside him, regardless of her desperate struggles to break free.

The men with the horses came near. Connie's frenzied fight suddenly stopped. She slumped to the ground. Gary felt certain she must have fainted. But Austell did not let go of her until he had lifted her up into the grasp of the nearer rider. He then jumped on one of the led-horses, took the girl from his man, and loped away toward the Hat-on road.

The two riders trotted back to the group of their fellow-punchers, probably to deliver Austell's final orders regarding the attack. After a brief stop, they galloped away after their boss.

CHAPTER XXIII

A MUTTERED curse from Jack reached Gary's ears between the cracking roar of the rifle-shots. Gary jumped down to bend over the man he had thought dead.

He now had time to look close at the blue weal made by the bullet that had struck Jack's temple. Instead of piercing the skull, the bullet had glanced from the end of the hard eye-socket bone.

Jack had only been knocked out, not killed. He was struggling back to semi-consciousness, growling curses in a dazed, perhaps delirious rage. His clothes, like Gary's, seemed to be riddled with bullet-holes. Gary jerked open the tattered shirt. A bullet had nipped Jack's side just above his broad belt. Another had scorched across his breast over his heart, probably as he whirled in his fall.

But Gary could see no fatal wound. He ran to fetch bottles of ginger ale from the old bar. A spurt of fizz in Jack's face brought him out of his daze. He staggered to his feet.

"Connie!" he shouted, and he lurched toward the door.

Gary dragged him back.

"Wait, you bonehead! We want to help her. Can't do it by committing suicide. Come back. We've got to shoot our way out past Lobo. Must have horses. Austell's carrying her to the Hat-on."

As Jack rushed for the bunk-room door, he reached for his pistol. His hand struck the top of the empty holster. He halted in his tracks.

"Gun gone! Must 'a' dropped it—out there."

"Go on," urged Gary. "My pair is enough."

Midway of their rush through the bunk-room, they met the smell of burning hay. The kitchen was hazy with smoke. Bundles of lighted hay had been thrust through the loopholes, and more hay was being prodded in to drop on the flaring fires.

Gary's burst of shots through each loophole put a sudden stop to the poking. Jack had headed for the barrel from which hung a water dipper. But he swerved to catch up a butcher knife from beside the stove and plunge its blade into a pile of sacked flour.

Hurled upon the burning table, the first ripped sack smothered the fire with a splurge of white powder. More bursting sacks snuffed out the other fires.

Gary jumped up onto the smoking table. He jerked in the hay that wadded up the loophole. But when he sought to peer through the opening, he found his view fogged by a thick swirl of smoke outside.

"The door," he called down to Jack. "They're burning the door. Must have a big fire stacked against it."

"Got us holed up here," shouted Jack. "We'll have to make our break out front."

GARY dashed after him back into the store. But even Jack recoiled from the front door. Whether or not the riflemen had come closer, their bullets were splintering through the door faster than ever. Their shots appeared to be aimed at the side opposite the hinges and at the height of the bar.

Even as Gary halted behind Jack, to the left of the doorway, the thick oak bar shattered in two. Its end fell out of the socket in the door-jamb. The door began to give

back before the shock of the striking bullets.

"No chance here," Gary cried out the obvious fact. "They'd drill us sure. We must make our get-away, or we can't help Connie. If only we could jump through that rear door fire! Can't be many of them there."

Jack started to reply, and halted to stare at the stream of dirt that was falling upon the old bar. "Hell's bells!" he cursed. "They're digging through the roof!"

"Let them," said Gary. "This is getting too thick. I'm an officer defending my prisoner. It's past time for winging 'em. I'll get the first lyncher that shows his head."

"No such luck," growled Jack. "Lobo savvies his job. Must have the store insured. That's dynamite 'longside the barbed wire. They'll shove in a burning haystack and back off to pick up the pieces."

"Dynamite?" cried Gary. "Dynamite!"

"Yeah, boy. Vance must 'a' remembered it and left word for Lobo how to proceed. Say your prayers, buddy. We're a pair of hell-bent *bobos*. There's two-three hundred pounds of the stuff Vance ordered for his new dam. Most any bullet is apt to jar it off, once the door swings open. The box of caps is next the dynamite. 'Scuse me. I'll take my chances of dodging shots. C'mon!"

But Gary gripped his arm.

"No. I remember—dynamite at a big fire. Brace the door and chase back to the kitchen."

GARY spoke with more assurance than he felt. But he had to head off Jack from another rush out into that deadly rifle-fire. Only half convinced, Jack heaved three or four cases of canned goods against the door.

By the time he reached the bar, Gary had a box of dynamite broken open and had snatched up two sticks of dynamite, along with the cap-box and a coil of fuse.

Though no more burning hay had been poked into the kitchen, smoke was pouring in through the loopholes. It was also seeping in at every crevice of the door except the inch-wide crack on the threshold, where the cool inner air of the room was sucking outward.

Gary capped and fused one stick of dynamite and nodded to Jack through the deepening haze of smoke.

"Stand on this side with the saddles. If it works we can hot-foot out. I'll handle the gats while you saddle up."

"Shoot!" shouted Jack.

HE swung the saddles onto his shoulder. Gary stooped and reached out sideways to flick his bomb through the crack under the door. With all his quickness, his hand and arm had barely jerked clear when the roaring explosion bulged in the lower part of the ponderous door. Flame, smoke, embers, hot dirt spurted through the gaping cracks.

Yet in an instant the door sprang back into place. Though its lower planks were shattered, it had not been blown off its old hand-wrought hinges. The bar also had held. Gary kicked the door to loosen the jammed bar, slid the bar out of its socket, and gave the door a hard tug inward.

The dynamite had more than blown the flaming heap of fuel to pieces. The shock of its concussion had put the fire out. Through the whirling smoke Gary saw the horses plunging at the far side of the small corral.

As he dashed out toward them, over the smoking bits of wood, he caught sight of Wy, unmasked, gaping around the corner of the hayrack. The big foreman's six-shooter was leveled toward the door. But his astonishment over the explosion slowed his pull on the trigger just a split second too long.

Gary could not break the habit that had become second nature to him. His shot was aimed only to hit Wy's shoulder. As the six-shooter fell, Wy's left hand thrust skyward. Gary ran past him and whirled to look up on the dirt roof of the building.

One of the two men on top was still digging with a shovel. The other stood waiting with an ax, ready to chop the roof poles. At sight of Gary he dropped the ax and pulled his gun. Gary winged him. The shoveler threw up his hands.

Jack had run past toward the horses. A shot knocked the saddles off his shoulder. He jerked them around to serve as a shield, and yelled warningly. Gary had already whirled to face to the right. As Lobo Leet popped one eye out past the corner of the wall to fire, Gary let drive from the hip with both guns.

He did not wait to see the lank body of the killer hit the dust. He jerked one pistol around at the man on the roof. The shoveler had started to lower his arms.

"That's it," Gary called to him. "Turn your back and toss your gun over your shoulder. . . . . Good! Now get to your digging—raise a dust. You other bird, swing up that ax."

Both men hastened to obey. Gary sidled around to pick up Wy's six-shooter. He nodded to the scowling foreman.

save Miss Connie from that devil Austell."

Wy's heavy face had gone haggard from the pain of his shattered shoulder-joint. But he forgot the agony in a flare of righteous wrath.

"Go get the skunk, kid! Me an' Lobo on'y laid with the bunch at the butte to dry-gulch you. It was Austell rustled them



Down behind the crest ledges, Jack slipped off and crept back to peer cautiously over the top.

"You can flop your wing down now. I'm borrowing your gun for Jack. He dropped his when he tried to stop your boss from kidnaping his sister."

"Kidnap?" muttered Wy. "Aw, bunk! Austell is a devil, but not that kind. He wouldn't hurt Miss Connie."

"Step to the corner with me and take a look. He dragged her off—took her on his horse. Unless there's a dip in the ground, they'll still be in sight."

THE foreman's jaw sagged. " 'Fore God, I knowed he was bad, but I'd 'a' swore he wasn't that bad."

"Who worked the frame-up on Jack, planting that rustled Tonto stock on his range?" asked Gary. "Was it you or Austell or Lobo?"

The last name sent Wy's glance darting toward the body sprawled in the dust at the corner of the wall.

"Kid, I got to hand it to yuh. That's the second time I seen yuh beat Lobo at trigger-twiggling. Yuh could 'a' popped me off like a calf. All yuh done was bust my shoulder. 'Cause why?"

"Couldn't help it with Lobo," said Gary. "He showed only his head, and I had to stop him. Jack and I are on our way to Tonto bronc's we rode. It was him used a running-iron on them calves to frame-up Royd. Slicker work! Now for him to go an' take Miss Connie! Hope you lay him out like you done Lobo!"

A shout from Jack, and the pounding of hoofs, told Gary the horses were saddled. He glanced around, expecting to see his pinto. But Jack was on one of Lobo's broncos and leading the other. Both animals were still high-strung and quivering from their fright over the dynamite explosion.

Gary handed Wy's revolver to Jack and jammed both his own guns tight in their holsters. As he expected, the bronco started to plunge and whirl around in circles when he tried to mount. He never could have made his saddle had not Jack grabbed the bronco's bridle and buttressed his own horse against the dancing animal's off side.

The moment Gary was in his saddle, Jack let go and spurred his bronco for the corral entrance at a bucking run. Gary's bronco also crow-hopped, though fortunately he did not pitch as hard as Jack's. Gary was able to stick on.

Even more fortunately, the attackers had left the corral gate open. While Jack and

Gary were intent upon the fractious broncos, the unwounded man on the roof had found courage to drop his shovel and pull his gun. The fast-banging automatic must have dropped both Jack and Gary before they cleared the corral if their horses had not been plunging so wildly.

JACK fired back one shot, between pitches. Gary had too much to do staying in his saddle to shoot at all. But the broncos swirled through the open gateway, side by side, without crashing against the gate posts. And once clear of the corral, they lined out at a dead run that quickly took them beyond pistol-range from the building.

The gate was at the far end of the corral, away from the station. The big adobe building, the feed-rack and a shed had hidden from the men out in front all that was happening in the corral. The upflung hands on the roof had been offset by their quick lowering and the resumption of the shovel work.

Owing to the combination of luck, quick shooting, quick saddling and quick wit, the outslipping pair got away to a flying start. But Gary felt none too easy even after his bronco settled down to straight running and the man on the roof had stopped his erratic shooting.

With his unbroken arm the wounded man had started to signal the bunch out in front. When Jack and Gary raced into sight on the open ground, some of the bunch were already mounting their horses. The others swung their rifles around. Gary wondered why they did not at once open fire. Then he guessed that they could not make out the wounded signaler's shouts and gestures. They were uncertain whether one or both of the hasty riders belonged to their own crowd.

The delay was hardly more than momentary. Such experienced punchers had only to get an eyeful of Gary's riding to see that he was no cowboy. Yet their brief hesitation meant many yards to horses running at top speed. Also the breaks of the game were still with Jack and Gary. The men who had not jumped for their horses happened to have only a cartridge or two left in their rifles. These first shots missed. Before the riflemen could reload, Jack swerved off to the right and jumped his bronco into a broad wash. Gary made the leap after him just as the rifles cracked loose again.

The wash wound away to the east of north, and its gravelly bed was hard going. But unlike all the other horses, the broncos were fresh. Jack kept them on a run until well beyond rifle-shot from the bunch afoot. At the next break in the bank of the wash, he jumped his horse up onto the level desert.

Though the sprint had dropped the pursuing horsemen farther to the rear, they were still within range and coming fast along the bank of the wash. They at once spread out and opened fire.

Jack bent forward over his saddlehorn to spur his bronco into another burst of speed. Gary's horse followed his leader in this second sprint. It was a killing pace even for the toughest of desert-bred horses. Gary now realized why Jack had not resaddled their own horses.

The fresh broncos literally ran away from the pursuers. The following horses, already tired by their chase from the butte, could not hold up under the strain. They soon slowed down. The rifle-fire also slackened. Even at the first none of the shots had come near. Any hit with a rifle bullet fired from a galloping horse is a sheer accident.

HALF a mile more, and the outdistanced pursuers gave up shooting. None the less, they followed along as best they could. Jack had been angling a little to the left. He and Gary struck into the Hat-on trail. That proved to the gang that the pair were after their boss. They might yet catch them between two fires.

Jack eased the pace down to a moderate gallop and signed for Gary to come up beside him.

"Buddy," he said, "you pulled it off. That dynamite stunt and the way you nailed Lobo! I don't give a damn if you are a killer. Side with me till I get Vance, and I'll side with you till hell freezes over."

"No," replied Gary. "We're not going for him. It's for Connie."

"Same thing," snapped Jack.

Gary did not answer. The ride from the Tonto out to the Box R and all the way in to the rails had fairly wrecked him. Atop that had come the gun-fight at the old fort-store, and now this second ride for life—

No, it was not a ride for life—it was, as he had said, for Connie. Had it been only to save his own life or Jack's, he must have dropped off the galloping bronco. He

was all in—used up. Yet he could not give way. He had to keep going— Connie needed his help.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE pursuing bunch of Hat-on riders had been distanced nearly a mile when Gary sighted Austell and his pair of followers rounding the end of a ridge half as far ahead.

The three horses were walking. This may have been due to the fact that Austell's horse was carrying double. More probably Austell, having gotten Connie beyond sight of the rails, was taking his time. His idea may have been to loiter along until his gang could finish the penned-in victims and overtake him.

Jack's eyes were better trained than Gary's to interpret distant movements. He flung out his clenched fist and shouted a curse.

"What—is it?" panted Gary, spurring up beside him.

"They've spotted us, buddy. Didn't you see 'em duck? Vance'll mosey along and leave his pair of black-jacks to pick us off. Bound to get us from cover even if I had a hatful of rifle clips. . . . . No, wait!"

The sullen ruddy-brown eyes flared with reckless elation.

"It's the big arroyo. Road skirts its bank back alongside of that ridge. There's a fool-killer cut-across. Only thing, you couldn't make it."

Gary did not hesitate. "I'll stick to the road—keep them busy while you head him off."

The look Jack gave him was ample pay for the offer.

The road kept on until close to the rocky barrier of the ridge before it twisted off to the right to stretch for the turn around the ridge end. At the twist a barranca cut down the ridge to continue as a small arroyo, or wash, that drained into the big arroyo.

Jack cut up the steep boulder-strewn bed of the barranca. Gary crossed over the wash and galloped ahead to where the sharp bend of the big arroyo pinched the road tight against the end of the ridge.

The bronco, still galloping strong, rapidly lessened the distance to the turn. They came within close range of it. Even an ordinary rifle-man could not have failed to hit his mark so near at hand. Yet still no bullets came cracking to knock Gary out of his saddle.

There was the chance that the two guards had guessed Jack's stratagem and ridden on to protect their boss. At the thought, Gary bent forward over his saddlehorn to spur his bronco into a sprint. And then—

The bullet that had been aimed for his heart pierced through the muscle at the left base of his neck, missing the jugular vein less than an inch. The other bullet drilled his hat brim.

HIS jerk on the bit swerved the bronco to the left so suddenly that the second pair of bullets both missed. A moment later the animal crashed through a big thorn bush. Gary, already tottering for a fall, was clawed out of his saddle by the hooked thorns.

The shock did not quite stun him. As instinctively as a dazed boxer counters a blow, he rolled sideways behind a sheltering boulder. Here was safety, at least for a few moments. He dropped flat on his chest, utterly spent.

Yet even before he caught his breath, which had been knocked out of him by his fall, the thought of Connie again started to galvanize his nerves to renewed effort. Through his hot brain flashed mental pictures of the two riflemen racing on along the road—of Jack shot down like himself —of Austell making his get-away with Connie.

That last stung his lax muscles like the lashing strokes of a rawhide quirt. He struggled to his knees. The thorn-torn bronco had swung back into the road and come to a quivering, snorting halt. He might possibly stand still for his rider to remount. But at best that would mean stepping out from behind the boulder to where the hidden riflemen would have clear aim.

ON the other hand, there was no other cover for several yards up the rocky pitch of the ridge. As Gary hesitated, he noticed the blood that dripped from his neck down upon the back of his left hand. He wadded his neckerchief into both ends of the wound. This gave him time to recall his promise to Jack that he would keep the riflemen busy.

A rush straight at the bronco would have sent the beast off on the jump. Gary steadied himself and walked briskly out

from behind the boulder at an angle to bring the bronco between him and the place from which the shots had been fired.

The bronco shied around to eye him. But no more shots broke the hot hush of the desert afternoon. The conviction seized upon Gary that his ambushers had ridden on to get Jack. He had need of all his self-control to keep from rushing the bronco.

The animal was all too uneasy even over his rider's slow sideward approach. But Gary spoke to him soothingly and kept his hands down. When the bronco started to whirl away from him, he managed by quick footwork to step on the trailing reins.

Still no bullets came driving to complete the work of the first one. The bronco, once caught, stood quiet. Spurred by desperation, Gary jerked his foot up into the stirrup and fairly jumped on.

THE jab of his spurs sent the bronco bounding along the road. The plunging beast grazed the brink of the twenty-foot drop-off into the arroyo and swerved sharply along it to the left.

Gary did not heed how narrowly they were shaving the edge of destruction. His gaze had fixed upon the sloping far bank, where, through the thin foliaged tops of the arroyo's trees, he saw two riders spur up over the edge to race away eastward at top speed.

Before he could guess what this meant, his bronco sprinted on around the sharp point of the ridge to where the road straightened out. Not two hundred paces ahead Austell was back-trailing at a dead run. He still had Connie gripped fast before him.

Close behind the kidnaper, Jack raced to overtake him, yelling and flourishing Wy's six-shooter like a madman. But strangest of all, down the west slope beyond Jack were flying a whole bunch of wild riders.

Gary surmised that the new gang were Drake and his outfit coming to lynch Jack for the rustling. All the more reason to hasten the rescue of Connie! No, it would be better to let Austell get past, then overhaul him during the run away from the Tonto outfit.

But Austell did not give Gary time to turn out of the road. At sight of him he had started to pull his horse. As he wheeled the animal around, he thrust out his pistol for a pop shot.

Jack saw the movement in time to duck forward and jerk the head of his bronco upward. Shot through the brain, the bronco pitched down, hurling Jack heels over head.

As Gary fired into the air, in an attempt to divert Austell's attention, he saw Connie struggling to wrest Austell's pistol out of his grasp. She might be able to cling to it a few seconds while Gary's sprinting bronco brought him up alongside the two. Gary dug in his spurs.

But his shot had served only to warn Austell that instant action was needed. Unable to free his pistol from Connie's clutch, Austell jumped off his horse with her. A sideward wrench flung the girl to one side. He thrust out his pistol. Jack had struggled up on one elbow. The old six-shooter roared.

Austell staggered back. The pistol fell from his down-sinking hand. He swayed, clutched at his waist, and crumpled slowly to the ground.

Gary was reining in his bronco. But he did not stop. The quickness with which Connie had picked herself up showed that she had not been badly hurt. No need to look twice at Austell to see he was done for. But the Tonto bunch were coming fast, with Drake several lengths in the lead.

After that one shot Jack had flattened down. He lay motionless. Gary stopped the bronco beside him and slid out of the saddle. Though the ground reeled under him like a boat in choppy waves, he managed to balance himself from falling.

Before his dizzy eyes the swiftly swelling form of the Tonto bunch's leader split into two Drakes. But what of that? He had a gat for each of those red-faced squint-eyed twins! He steadied the guns, one at each side of his belt, and called a sharp warning:

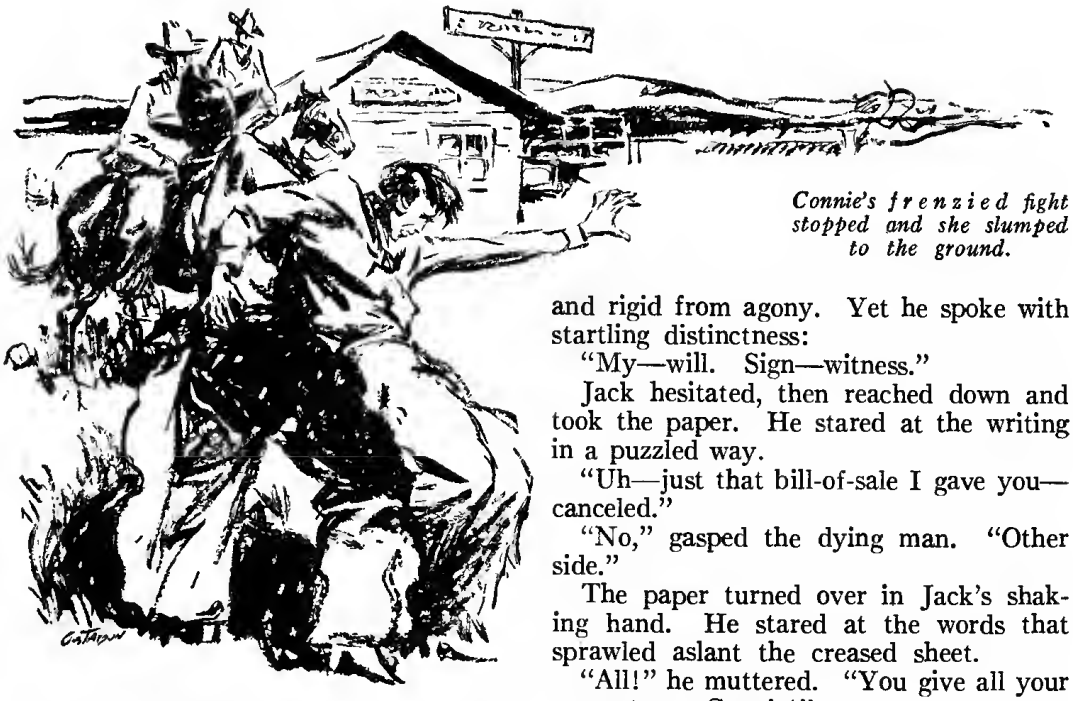
"Halt! Royd's my prisoner."

The twin horses and Drakes slithered to a stop in a cloud of dust—and suddenly ceased to be twins. The one scowling Drake roared an angry remonstrance:

"Let up, kid. Royd's all right. It's Austell I'm after!"

NINE punchers came piling up behind their leader in rapid succession. Gary's clearing gaze recognized Lin and others of the Box R men. Drake was unbuckling the rope from his saddle. He growled an explanation:

"I got Royd's boys with me, kid. Aus-



Connie's frenzied fight stopped and she slumped to the ground.

tell done the rustling. We been tracking him. The hawse he rode was in his round-up string. Got a bar 'cross the nigh hind shoe, 'count of a split hoof. Quit yore fooling now and lemme by. I'm going to put my rope on him."

Gary did not lower his pistols.

"No. He's my prisoner. The Sheriff deputized me. There'll be no lynching."

Jack was pulling himself up on his knees. He turned his scratched, dirt-grimed face toward Drake.

"You're too late, Tonto. I beat you to it," he said, with no trace of exultance in his husky voice. "My shot went low, but —Vance wont need the rope."

"All right, that goes," agreed Drake and he dropped his rope.

Gary shoved his pistols into their holsters. As he swayed over, Drake sprang in to keep him from falling. Gary twisted around in those bear-like supporting arms. He had something to say to Connie before he went under.

She had knelt beside Austell, holding his head and shoulders up against her. His hand was moving on the top of his thigh—scrawling with a pencil on a piece of paper.

Jack staggered up. He and Drake and the men all moved forward, and Gary found himself moving with them, held on his feet by Drake's powerful grasp.

Austell stopped his slow scrawling. He lifted the paper and pencil in his heavy hand. His upturning face was ghastly gray and rigid from agony. Yet he spoke with startling distinctness:

"My—will. Sign—witness."

Jack hesitated, then reached down and took the paper. He stared at the writing in a puzzled way.

"Uh—just that bill-of-sale I gave you—canceled."

"No," gasped the dying man. "Other side."

The paper turned over in Jack's shaking hand. He stared at the words that sprawled aslant the creased sheet.

"All!" he muttered. "You give all your property to Connie!"

The girl cried out in protest: "Oh, no! No, Vance! I—I couldn't take it—from you!"

He twisted his head up and backward to peer at her through the glaze that had already dimmed the bright blue of his eyes.

"Connie, I'm bad—own it. Bound for—hell. Got Jack into scrapes. Let me pay —pay what I can. . . . . God, how I love you—"

What Connie saw in those darkening eyes Gary could not tell. But he saw the upwelling flood of tenderness that swept the repulsion and horror from her face. He saw her bend low and stroke Austell's sweat-beaded forehead.

His own eyes went dark. He became vaguely aware that his back and chest were wet from the reopened wound in his neck. Then blackness fell upon him.

CHAPTER XXV

WAVES—cool waves and the stifling heat of midsummer on his favorite Lake Shore bathing beach. Gary felt himself afloat, with the rollers breaking over him.

Then he realized that the waves were striking only his head and face . . . . they became small gushes of water. That flashing glare above his head was not a searchlight, it was a sun-glinting bit of metal on a canteen.

The mouth of the canteen pressed against

his opening lips. He swallowed, and gazed up into the friendly eyes of Jack Royd. The bruised lips below the skinned nose twisted in an encouraging half-grin.

"Keep a-coming, buddy. You're making the grade."

Gary groped for speech and managed to whisper a word: "Connie?"

"Just hit out to fetch a wagon, soon's she saw you'd be O. K. That fool Hat-on bunch had the gall to show themselves down the road. Tonto and the boys went to bring them into camp."

"Austell?"

THE smiling eyes clouded with regret. "Cashed in. If only I hadn't—but it was him or me!"

"Yes," agreed Gary, that bitter taste of failure and loss in his mouth. "It's bound to happen, sooner or later, no matter how good you think you are at handling a gat. We're a pair of killers. But you're her brother. That lets *you* out."

Jack stared down at him and started to reply, but blurred into a mumbled mutter about locoed *bobos*. He backed off to swing a sag-headed bronco around so that its shadow fell upon Gary.

Though Gary's arms felt heavy as lead, he tried to pull them up to feel what was pressing so tight on the side of his neck.

"Quit it," ordered Jack. "Lie still. You don't want to open up that hole again. We've got it hog-tied. But no telling what it'll do if you keep squirming."

Gary let his hands go lax and lay still. After all, he and Jack had saved Connie. What did anything else matter? The shadow of the horse added to the grateful coolness from the wetting by the water out of the canteen. He felt very tired. It would be good to go to sleep now—and forget!

He roused to the sound of a bluff voice that boomed with rather oily heartiness. "By—jakes! Chief of police, you say? That shooting kid is going to keep his star if I have to cram it down his throat."

"Shore yuh will, Sutton," came back a grimly humorous reply in the voice of Tonto Drake. "You'll keep him for yore deputy till we cain vote him in as Sheriff! How 'bout them other letters, Miss Connie?"

ABOVE Gary's opening eyes appeared neither blue sky nor stars but a rough lamplit ceiling. His neck was still too tightly bound for him to be able to turn his head. But Connie's voice sounded closer than the others. It had an odd quaver.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Drake. This one from the Payroll Delivery Company is still better. Listen. 'To Whom It May Concern: This is to certify that Gary Owen resigned from our force to become a special officer. We employ no man who can not show a hundred per cent record as regards both character, past history and ability. As payroll guard before we began to use armored cars, Owen helped to prevent five attempted hold-ups. Each time he was the guard mainly responsible for saving the money and capturing the bandits. He never missed a shot, yet never killed a man.'"

Drake gave the fat sheriff another dig: "That cinches it, Sut. A kid that's got the sand and savvy to no more'n wing skunks banging at him with sawed-off shotguns—"

"No," Gary broke in. "All you have to do is get in the first shots."

"Yep, kid. Yuh got the idee," agreed Drake. "Allus was my own practice—beating 'em to the draw. On'y you seem dead set on fancy wing-shooting. You done it even in yore first go with Lobo."

"Please," said Connie. "Here's the last letter—the fourth. I like it best of all. It's from Mr. M'Gruder—Michael P. M'Gruder. Here it is:

"'Miss Constance Royd. Madam: Gary Owen writes me to give you the low-down on him. Well, madam, the worst slam I can give him is he is too damn' careful not to hurt the guys he gets. His fool notion is just to puncture their gat fins. The reward for killers and bank-robbers dead is double what he gets for them alive.'"

Connie paused to catch her breath, then went on still more quaveringly:

"'All the same, he has been my head gun in breaking up one Mafia blackhand bunch and three bootleg gangs. Also he blocked two attempts to bump me off. Last time he got hit. Broke the gunman's shoulders from the floor. The gangs call him Gary the Gat because he can outshoot the coldest-blooded killers among them. He writes something about a cow-farm. If he wants to buy a dairy or two out in your country, tell him he is welcome to draw on me up to fifty grand.'"

"Huh?" grunted Tonto Drake.

The voice of Jack "chipped in" a bit of modern knowledge: "A grand is a thousand dollars."

"Say, looky here—" Drake's freckled fist appeared above Gary's side to level a thick forefinger at his face. "You young son-of-a-gun, you don't need no grands to buy into the Tonto. I'm r'aring to hitch up with a pard that'll be a sort of—uh—son—a kid with sand and the savvy."

Again it was Jack who replied: "We're both too late, Tonto. The Hat-on got in first bid."

Gary was still puzzling over what this could mean when a quiet remark from Connie ended the long-drawn moment of silence:

"Mr. Drake, why can't we make it a kind of family matter? We've had too much of the opposite. I—I can't stand any more of it. Can't you consider Jack and me as a sort of son-in-law and a sort of daughter-in-law?"

"Huh? Huh, yuh little cuss! D'yuh mean—"

"Hush!" Connie's voice almost shrilled. "He must be quiet. It's time you went."

HE heard a sudden scraping of feet and chairs, and a gruff chuckle from Drake, followed by Sheriff Sutton's stage whisper: "The lucky dude!"

The sound of footsteps lessened. A door closed. The hush convinced Gary that he had been left alone. He sought to relieve his feelings with a groan.

Almost instantly Connie's face appeared above his head. Her hand touched his forehead and started to stroke it—as it had stroked Austell's forehead. Remembrance of that made him flinch.

"Don't! I'm not fit—no more than he was. I'm not only a gunman. I'm a killer—now. . . . . Lobo—"

"Ho! Jack told me all about that." The ruddy-brown eyes flashed, glowed, and melted. "You silly boy! It's high time you had some one to take care of you."

"But you've no cause to bother, Miss Connie. I've done nothing."

"Of course not!" she scoffed. "Just you try, though, to slip my rope! Why do you suppose I had Mr. Sutton, that day on the train, tell you to ask for work at the Hat-on?"

"You? You did that?"

"Of course. I knew Vance would refuse, and I counted on your then coming out to us. Only I didn't foresee the quarrel between Jack and Vance or that I would misunderstand what you are."

"A killer," put in Gary.

She clapped her hand over his mouth.

"I told you not to be silly. And you needn't think for a minute I'm going to let you go back to your frightful dangerous city life. You've settled things here and you're going to settle here. You'll be called upon as deputy for only an occasional shooting-case or rustling, or maybe a bank robbery. Nothing to compare with those awful gangs."

"Deputy? It's gunman work, just the same."

Again the ruddy-brown eyes flashed.

"Your kind of work—the kind my father did. Not gangster killings—not bad-man gun-play. My father was Sheriff of this county. He died fighting for law and order."

Gary swallowed the lump in his throat.

"Well—well, then, I'm going to explain about my knowing how to stack the cards on Austell. A sleight-of-hand performer I happened to do a favor for showed me his card-tricks, and I'm naturally quick-handed. But I never before dealt crooked in a game. I wouldn't have done it then if—"

"If it hadn't been to help Jack, and Vance was cheating you," broke in Connie. "You had to do it to save Jack from losing everything by Vance's dishonesty. But we're talking now about our plans. Next election you're going to be Sheriff, as Tonto said, unless—"

"Yes?"

"Unless you'd rather stay home all the time and let me run you as well as the Hat-on."

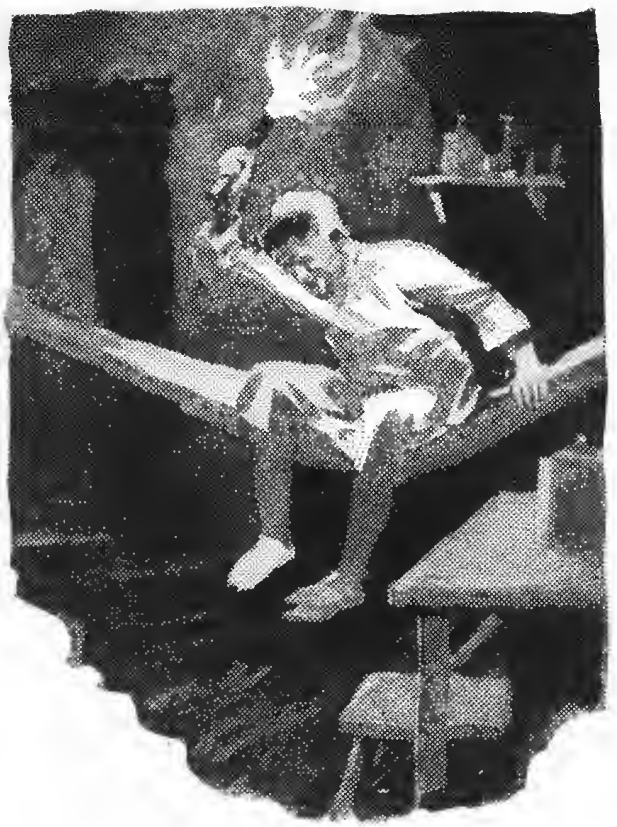
GARY'S muscles might be weak, but they had lost none of their quickness. His fingers clutched her back-jerking arm.

"No, you don't. You spoke of taking care of me. I need a lot of attention right now. That is, I do if you're going to run me and I'm going to run for office. But it can't be true, Connie—dear."

"Oh, can't it? I suppose I'll have to prove it to you."

Suddenly he felt his head clasped between her strong little hands. The look in her eyes told him how foolish he had been to doubt. Her lips came very close to his lips.

"Gary boy, you're the man I've been waiting for all my life!"



The Silent Terror

By
Edgar Young

This man undertook a Business venture in Central America — and ran into difficulties both peculiar and highly exciting.

SUFFICE it to say I am a wanderer with a bit of the ne'er-do-well in my make-up. Farming in the Virginia mountains was so tame that one day I left—cached away in the "possum-belly" of a coke rack on the Virginia and Southwestern Railroad—for the great outside. But the great outside I found was tamer yet, at least so far as the United States was concerned. Shop, factory, office, lumberjacking, ice-cutting, harvesting in Dakota, glomming hops in Oregon, tailing up decrepit steers in the Panhandle—I wearied of all these and many more, and went roaming off into Mexico and those countries to the south which in my imagination were pictured as wonderful and romantic as the fabled lands of the Arabian Nights.

It's a long drill from Nogales, Arizona-Mexico, to Guaymas, and a seven-hundred-kilometer jaunt to Mazatlan. From there the dusty trail winds through smoking volcanoes and around giddy precipices to Guadalajara, a twelve days' hike for a man with a pack on his back. Thence down through the Valley of Mexico which is no valley at all but a high plateau fringed about with snow-clad mountain ranges and dotted here and there with extinct volcanoes, among which the gaunt, hunch-backed Popocatapetl stands like a white-capped monarch. Only slightly less hoary with age are the terraced pyramids rearing up from the cactus-grown plains.

Seven months after I left Nogales I arrived in Port Limon. As the crow flies, I had come twelve hundred miles—and as the typical tropical tramp meanders, from ox-cart road to mule path and Indian pack-track, through jungle and along beaches, I had walked at least five hundred miles more.

I was trail-worn and weary. I had a touch of fever and a touch of the sun. There were saddle-sores on my back where the sixty-pound pack had ridden, and my shoulders and forehead were raw from the pack-rope and headband. I had no money. My shoes were worn out. I was barefooted, and barelegged to the knees where my faded blue overalls hung in tatters. My jumper was in ribbons. My sandy hair was matted in a thatch on head and neck, for I had given up the luxury of a hat far back in Nicaragua when I swam a rapid in the upper Segovia.

THUS I arrived in Port Limon, sick, broke, partly nutty and with nowhere to go. There was but a bare handful of thatched huts clustered on the beach, for the United Fruit had not yet begun operations there and the place was a port only for sailing canoes and small coasting vessels. These huts were occupied by English-speaking negroes, runaway slaves from the West Indies—gray-haired old fellows who had felt the *swoosh* of the lash in the canefields of Jammokka and Bajos, and the searing sun, the gnawing vines and biting sawgrass of the tropical trail. They had mated with stolid Indian squaws, outcasts from an inland tribe, and some of their mixed-blood children—Zamboes—grown to manhood and womanhood, had intermarried.

These people treated me with kindness, doctoring my fever with herbs and my tropical sores with poultices of leaves and roots. In two weeks I was eating roasted yams, fried plantain and fish, savory fruits and coconut milk. Living, to these people, was the simple matter of a few banana bushes, a coffee-tree, a hill or two of yams, a few leaning coconut trees. Back in the jungle were mangoes, aguacotes, tree-melons and whatnot. In the sea was fish, and at night great lumbering turtles scrambled up on the beach to spawn gallons of eggs in shallow holes in the sand.

But as I recovered my health, the old urge to be moving along took hold of me. I wanted to be on my way, though I did not know where I was going. I had heard that the French were about to begin work on the Panama Canal, four hundred miles below. I might get a job there. Then there was Brazil—where I had heard of gold and diamonds being mined. Or Uruguay or Argentine, where hard-riding *gauchos* herded cattle among the bunches of grass on the *llanos*. The copper mines of Peru, the tin mines of Bolivia high in the tops of the Andes, the nitrate fields of Chile, these dim beacons and others heard of by chance at some time or other, set the wanderlust drumming in my head.

Sandal-clad and with clean, patched clothing, I hit the beach trail toward the south one day. Early and late I traveled the white hard sand down near the water's edge until I had put a hundred miles between me and Port Limon. A certain thought had found lodgment in my brain in refutation of the varied lures the wanderlust held out: "What's the use—why the hurry? It wont amount to anything; you'd be sick of Panama in a week,—of Brazil in a day,—and you'd be heading north from Argentine by the time you hit there!"

It was due partly to this internal battle, and due partly to accident, that I went up the Changuenola River. Plodding along the beach one afternoon I came across a canoe which had been tossed up by a wave and left high and dry when the tide went out, a canoe such as those used by the coast Indians and negroes for taking their coconuts, yams and plantains to the larger ports for sale.

There was a battered old sea-chest lashed to rings in the bottom of the canoe up near the prow and tied shut with a rope end. Slashing this fastening and prying the top open, the chest appeared to be full of hard-packed dry sand, but upon tumbling it out of the canoe bottom-side up, an ax, a cap-and-ball revolver, a sealed can of powder and a small one of caps, a hunk of lead, a machete, and a demijohn of *aguardiente* were disclosed. Poking about in the sand I further found a wad of faded calico, a coil of rope, a few yards of drill, a pot, a skillet and a coconut-shell cup.

I FLOATED the canoe by prying first one end, then the other, with a piece of driftwood until I had it in the water. Then I loaded in my blanket-roll and the chest and its contents, which I had dusted and cleaned as best I could. Using the piece of driftwood for a paddle I set off southward along the shore, hugging it closely, although the Caribbean was like glass, and by sundown I came to the mouth of the Changuenola, the largest river between Limon and Bocas del Toro. The tide was at the full. I paddled the canoe up the river to the edge of the jungle and dragging it aground made coffee, warmed over the plantains and yams and other provender the Cimaroons had given me, and sat for a long time over the fire, thinking.

The conclusions arrived at that night were a turning-point in my life. The next morning after breakfast I pointed the canoe's nose up the river. The jungle growth was sparse in the sand at the mouth but soon a growth as dense as a mat walled either side. The river water was murky and muddy. Here and there the snout of an alligator poked up for a moment as I slid along or the stubby fin of a shark waved above the water like the hand of a drowning man. Farther up the water

grew clear as crystal and fish of various colors played around the boat. Macaws, birds of paradise, parrots, chattering songbirds, splotched the scene with moving colors. Monkeys chattered in the trees.

A FEW more miles and a cool breeze sucked down from the mountains, tempering the air and flinging about the scent of orchids and flowering vines. My eyes began to rove on either side for a suitable place to settle. I landed several times and looked about. At nightfall I tied up at the mouth of a little stream that merged its pristine waters with those of the Changuenola. In the morning, machete in hand, I followed this stream to its source a quarter of a mile inland, a great spring gushing from between two jungle-clad hills.

This jungle was not so dense as the lowland marshy mat, tied together with lianas and vines and wattled with briers and sawgrass beneath, but it was several times more dense than the thickest forest I had seen at home. By following deer-paths and peccary tracks, I cruised about in the woods all morning and when I returned to where I had moored the canoe my mind was made up. The timber growth was solid and firm, the berry bushes and briers bore fruit of luscious freshness, the birds flitted from branch to branch full of life and song. I had turned up dirt in a hundred places—it was black, friable and rich in my hands. My farm training in the hills of Virginia told me this was good ground, better land than any part of Florida, better even than any part of California. The temperature was perpetual spring: the year around it would average about 70°F.

That afternoon I set about to make a house—one of the easiest things to do in the tropics. I cut four forked poles, and scooping holes with my machete, set them in the ground. Up in these forks I placed poles I had cut. From these I mounted two sets of "A" shaped gable rafters and surmounted them with a ridgepole. The walls were of saplings, the roof of palm-thatch half a foot thick, the doors of short lengths of bamboo bound together with lianas as tough as whipcord, using for hinges two strips of bark.

At one side I built a lean-to, roofed with thatch and with a wall only halfway up, to be used as a kitchen. Within this I drove four forked stakes into the ground and built a platform on top, which I covered with several inches of dirt and clay. This was to build a fire upon, to avoid stooping when cooking my meals. I worked like a beaver from daylight until dark and in six days I finished house and lean-to, fashioned a rude table and chair, swung my hammock across the room and called myself at home.

This land was free and still is, the only requirement being to exercise squatter sovereignty over it, as I did. For the next year I worked like a dog, urged on by some trait within me, hitherto hidden. My great-grandfather had carved out a home on Wallen's Creek, Virginia, in the very early days. My granddaddy did the same at Yoakum, just across the ridge. My father went across into another valley and cleared up a homestead. It was in my blood, I suppose. I cut down trees, slashed brush and burned it, gouged holes in the ground and set out banana bushes and coffee-trees in regular rows, and prowled through the woods to find young mango trees to drag home and set out. I made deadfalls and fashioned traps of tough hardwood.

I wasn't entirely cut off from the world after a few months. The Indian women of the Cimaroons had relations up the river and although they paddled stolidly by without turning their heads either going or coming, as is their custom when away from their men, they had observed me and had taken back word. Wrinkled old Radford Buckaw, rubbing his hands and chuckling deep in his neck, had brought his whole family to see me one Sunday—though I hadn't known it was Sunday until he told me.

The French, he told me, were working fast and furious down in Panama and traders were combing the coast for grub. I told him to head a few my way and I would load their boats to the gunwales. He told me current prices that made me whistle—coconuts at a *real* and bananas four *reals* a bunch!

The next day I began getting ready for the traders to arrive. I bustled around merrily, thinking of my profits as I piled up coconuts, yams and yampees, slashed down banana bunches and piled them along the side of the house. There was a cone of cleaned coffee as high as I could reach and ten feet across at the base. In the house were a number of bales of skins and hides, each one of which I had taken from the animal, staked out and tanned by hand in the Indian fashion.

At existing prices my stock was worth

easily a thousand dollars, States money, possibly double that. I had about gutted the farm, but if they were paying such prices I would plant double that much for future sales. Prosperity and big money loomed just ahead. I had settled there, seeking only independence—but trade was finding me out! I was a very happy man when I dozed off to sleep that night.

DURING the night I woke up, a thing I rarely do. I opened my eyes and lay there as still as a mouse, scarcely breathing. A strange feeling of dread possessed me. Cold sweat oozed from my brow and trickled down upon my face and nose, though I am not given to ungrounded fears. I have slept out on the trail in the wildest parts of Mexico and Central America and these are not places where timid persons sleep out alone. In this spot I had lived by myself for over a year, a shaggy individual, physically tough, a man to inspire fear rather than to experience it.

I closed my eyes and tried to sleep. Yet the fear still clutched me. I reared up my head and peered about. Not a sound—not the chirrup of a cricket, not the low muffled whine of a mammy monkey stilling her babe, not the cheep of a bird, not the footfall of a night-prowling animal seeking my spring. The silence was absolute. I had never experienced such a stillness. My hair chilled on my head and I could scarcely breathe.

I groped above my head for the revolver swinging from the hammock rope. Rising to my knees in the hammock and gripping the pistol with a clutch of steel, I peered intently all about the room. A pale starlight sifted through the cracks and with my straining eyes I made out the four corners of the room, the table and the chest—but no intruder of any sort.

Thinking perhaps it was something on the outside staring through the cracks at me, I gave a hoarse, nightmarish yell to startle it into making a movement—then I would pour lead into it. Not a sound answered my shout. I gave other shouts and curses, daring it to come in.

I tried to leap up and run outside, firing the pistol, but my muscles refused to obey me. Some strange atavistic instinct kept me rooted to the hammock.

Perhaps my subconscious mind had picked up vibrations too highly tuned for consciousness. Perhaps, sleeping, I had become aware of a slight odor—a mere trace in the air of an acid gas—that had aroused biological memories buried by thousands of years, but yet there in the germ-plasm.

I stretched out my hand to the palm-oil dip that swung from the ceiling, and feeling under my pillow for flint and tinder I struck a light and lit the dip. The light blinded me for a moment and I sat there blinking. Then I slowly looked around the room. Apparently nothing was out of the ordinary. Dangling my legs over the hammock edge, I chided myself for the fright. Yet I did not feel right yet. What on earth was it? It was too much for me! *And then I saw.* Happening to glance down toward my feet I yanked them back frenziedly into the hammock.

The floor was black as ink. The floor was moving! Where my feet had been a wave of black rose and then subsided. My eyes bulged out of my head. What repulsive thing was this crawling below me in the room? I cudgeled my brains as I scrutinized the flowing mass. Then peering more closely, I made it out. The moving mass was composed of billions of black insects an inch long and with gaping jaws!

Horrified, I watched them move by. I remained for hours perched on the hammock, fascinated, scarcely breathing. It was daybreak before the rear guard passed through, each with a hunk of flesh many times its own size and weight in its jaws—the emergency rations for the march. When the last stragglers had passed I clambered stiffly to the floor and moved about to ease my stiffened joints. Then I went to the door and looked out. Coming out of the jungle at the far boundary of my farm was a clean-mowed street, clean as a swept floor except for the trees and larger saplings. Small bushes and plants had absolutely vanished before the voracious jaws of these hunter-ants. Every living thing the march had aroused had leaped up only to fall back amidst the myriads of murderous jaws. Birds, reptiles, all small animals—and large ones too if they happened to be lying down and were swarmed over before arising, for the ants boiled in a stream into eyes, mouth, ears and all natural openings of the body, tearing and rending as they entered, eating the animal alive as it threshed about.

I WALKED around the house. Gone were my bananas, my coconuts, my yams, my coffee—everything that was edi-

ble had vanished. I went inside and looked at the bales of skins—bundles of hair were all that remained! I had not noticed this during the night. Every pot and pan was scraped clean. The tin pail I had kept peccary lard in was as clean and polished within as if it had been scoured. My cabin had stood in their path and they had gutted it—perhaps in some manner they had sensed it and headed for it. Sadly I followed their trail to the river's edge. It ran smooth as a floor down to the very water.

Had they drowned in the river or had they crossed it? If so, how? By hanging to each other and pushing the vanguard over? By traveling under the water? The river was two hundred feet across at this point and there was considerable current.

I got in my canoe and paddling over to the opposite shore, drifted along close to the bank looking for the place they had landed. It should have been as plainly discernible as a street. Yet I couldn't find it. I drifted along for several hundred feet scanning the bank closely.

Then I happened to glance back over my shoulder. What I saw a few rods away puzzled me. A great ball, ten feet in diameter, was slowly revolving on the water and moving steadily toward me. I should have known, but I swear at the moment I thought it was a balloon or some hollow fungus that had floated out from a swamp farther up.

A chorus of shrill yells brought me to my senses and set me to paddling downstream furiously. A half-dozen canoes hove into sight and the occupants had taken in my predicament at a glance. Old Buckaw, in the prow of the leading canoe, did not stop waving his arms and shouting until my craft turned and lay beside his own.

We rested on our paddles and watched the ball of ants unmat and wind away into the forest. That was the last I saw of them. Although I remained for years in Costa Rica I never saw another army of them.

Oh, yes, I made good. Buckaw sent one of his boys back to Port Limon to fetch more help, and for a fortnight my farm swarmed with negroes, Talamanca squaws, and Zamboes. They cleaned and dug and set out trees and bushes, until my farm was twice as good as before. At the end of two months I had another crop and with my produce I filled two sloops that came up from Colon.

The Double Shut-out

SEVERAL years ago, I witnessed an occurrence in baseball that was both exciting and amusing. I was playing shortstop at the time with the Blues in one of the minor circuits of the South.

Jimmy Ryan, a pitcher new to us that spring, was a long, lanky sort of youngster, with bright red hair and a heavily freckled face. Naturally he was an object of much good-humored chaffing, and being of a bashful nature was continually "picked on" by the boys. I felt sorry for the kid, and warmed up to him, helping him out all I could. For all his awkward ways, Ryan was one of the best ball-players that I have ever seen. He was a natural-born pitcher, with an assortment of puzzling drops and a slow, easy, side-arm delivery. A scout had picked him up in Texas.

The first incident which led up to the climax of Ryan's triumph was when Stuart Waters, a sporting writer on the only newspaper in the city, visited the park to get a line on the coming team. Waters was an excellent sports-writer, but was too "cocky" (at least that was the term which we used) to be a favorite with the boys. However, as his paper was the only one representing the local club, he could make the players eat out of his hand, so to speak, in order to get a favorable write-up.

When Waters entered the park on that warm spring day, he was walking with Mary Denton, who was a sort of society editor on the paper. Waters in his cocksure way had already assumed that she would eventually marry him, and so went about with her with a proprietary air.

I never could see how Mary, who was a nice girl, could stand a man like Waters. Perhaps he amused her.



By

Don Browne

A notably amusing story of our favorite national Sport, baseball. Perhaps you too could send in a prize-winning Sport story.

Well, as I said before, Waters and Miss Denton entered the park together. She was leading a pet bulldog, a frisky creature that was always trying to run about and pull away from his chain. Benson the pitcher was a friend of hers, and so she stopped for a little chat with him, while Waters strolled over toward the dugout, where Ryan was looking over some of the bats.

I was standing close by and heard Waters say, "You are Ryan, our new pitcher, are you not?"

The lanky pitcher straightened up, his freckled face reddening, and stammered an affirmative reply. Waters, by nature so arrogant, was amused at Ryan's embarrassment, and asked him several questions, most of them frivolous, and some even impertinent.

The reporter at last started back to where Miss Denton and the boys were gathered, but was suddenly halted by a shrill cry from the girl: "Oh, Bobby's loose! Catch him, Stuart, he's broken loose from the chain!"

Up in front of the grandstand came a wild aggregation of ball-players. The active bulldog, rejoicing in his unaccustomed freedom, was racing madly over the green turf, his barks drowned out by the howling mob of ball-players, all trying to catch him for his distressed mistress. Waters was running down to meet them, intending to pen the dog between himself and the boys, but just as he reached out his hands to grab the pup, it dodged between his legs, upsetting the immaculate news-writer in the dust.

It was such an amusing sight that Ryan and I, who had remained out of the chase, could not help laughing aloud.

But Waters had become infuriated, and jumping up, he started after the dog again. Close behind him came the crowd of ball-players, all shouting as loud as they could. They were having a good time, if Waters wasn't. So was the pup, who had turned back to meet them, just before he got to the dugout where we stood. The reporter made a desperate dive, and on top of him landed the boys. Instantly there was a twisting mass of arms and legs thrashing about in the air. I thought that the dog would surely be killed, but to my surprise, when I turned around there was Ryan calmly holding him by the collar. His calmness, however, soon disappeared, for Miss Denton had arrived by this time, her profuse thanks and compliments to Ryan so confusing him that he could do nothing but stammer.

You can imagine how Waters looked when he was finally released from under the pile of players. He sure was a sight! And he became more angry when he saw Mary Denton so interested in Ryan, and paying no attention to *him*.

The next day he let off steam on his sporting page by poking fun at the "blushing young pitcher," as he termed him. He really said more than he should have about young Ryan and of course did not make any friends by it.

WHEN the season opened a few weeks later the Blues started out in fine form. After two weeks' play we were in third place. Ryan had pitched two games, winning both of them. His third game a few days later was the best of all. In it he held the opposing team to one score, the Blues winning 2 to 1. Ryan's pitching was so impressive and spectacular that at the end of the game Mary Denton and five of her girl friends all climbed over the box-seat railing, and rushed out through the crowd toward him. I knew that the red-head was bashful, but I didn't know until then just how exceedingly shy he was! When he saw the smiling girls coming his way and calling his name, he dropped his glove and ran through the bleachers on into the showers, leaving behind him a screaming crowd of enthusiastic fans.

The following day Waters had a supposed-to-be-funny story of the escape of Ryan. Again he said too many personal things about the bashful pitcher from Texas. It hurt the boy's feelings so much that he came to me that night and begged me to go with him to Waters with a plea to quit making fun of him. I agreed, and going up to the sports-writer's office, we put the matter before him. Now, Waters was a pretty good sport—at times—so he agreed to quit "guying" Ryan through his columns provided the red-head would pitch a shut-out game against the Bears, the league leaders, who had the hardest-hitting club in the circuit.

Two weeks later, and the last day at home for a month, we were matched with the league-leading Bears; if we could win this game we would be tied for first place. Ryan drew the assignment to pitch.

This game, I think, was one of the most gruelling that I have ever played or witnessed. Ryan did the best pitching of the season, his marvelous drop holding the Bears helpless. He was fighting for a shut-out! But in the first half of the eighth something happened: the first man up hit the first ball over for a triple. With the sweat pouring from his forehead, the red-head wound up after turning a warning glance to me. The next man grounded to the box. Ryan fumbled, but as I ran in to recover, he picked up the ball and snapped it to the plate. The runner, caught between third and home, was out, but the other man had reached second. Ryan, trembling nervously, started to wind up. I saw him glance toward the press-box where Waters was sitting with Mary Denton. She smiled at him and nodded. Looking back at Ryan, I saw his jaw set, and he whipped the ball over the plate like a bullet. "Strike," called the umpire, and two more followed rapidly. The last man up struck three times without success.

As we went to the dugout I saw Ryan glance up at the press-box and smile. Miss Denton smiled back and nodded her head again. I noticed Waters frowning at this.

In our half of the eighth things started off as if we would get nowhere. The first two men struck out. But Big Phil Wilcox, our rightfielder, connected with one which went over the left field fence for a home run. You should have heard the cheering! The third man flied out, however, leaving us with only one score.

The ninth inning was so short that we were scarcely in the field before the game was over. Ryan only threw eleven balls over the plate. He pitched with a sort of grim determination, and yet he smiled. But he had his shut-out, anyhow.

THAT night I was visiting Waters in his office. We had hardly begun a conversation about the big game before the door opened, and in walked Ryan. He stood with his hat in one hand, shifting his feet nervously, but grinning.

"Hello, Ryan," called Waters jovially. "You got your shut-out, huh? Well, I'll stick to my agreement and give you a real write-up tomorrow—no funny stuff! A shut-out's a shut-out, especially over the Bears."

"Yep," said Ryan, still grinning, "a shut-out's a shut-out. I reckon you might call today's game a double shut-out, Waters!"

"How so?" asked the news-writer.

"Well, you see I got married today—I shut out the girl's regular beau, and married her."

"What!" laughed Waters. "You married? Well, who in the world did *you* get up enough spunk to marry?"

"Her name," said the grinning pitcher, edging through the door, "used to be Denton—but it's Ryan now!"

Whether you believe it or not, whether you see an explanation for it or not—this odd tale of mystery is fascinating indeed



The Phantom Dog

By

Dr. Henry Black Burns

THE May night was clammily hot, and the darkness was relieved only by the occasional glow of lightning, flaring like distant gun-fire against the sky.

I was halfway down the hill that overlooks the Factory House, when in the sudden glow of the lightning I saw a big black dog, almost at my feet. I took another step, and the dog, turning across the road, leaped the old rail fence and disappeared. Then it came to me like the touch of a dead hand, that I had seen the dog not only in the brief flare of lightning, but also in the unrelieved Stygian darkness that followed!

At this time I was a young schoolteacher, engaged in the preparatory study of medicine; so after the fashion of my kind, I explained the occurrence on the ground of optical illusion or waking dream, and did not think it worthy of mention to anyone.

Summer vacation-time came and passed; in September the re-opening of the village school found me again its teacher. Weekends I always spent with my uncle at the old Factory House, a second home to me.

One gray Saturday afternoon in November I started, gun in hand, for a tramp among the ragged hills at whose base Silver Creek threads its shining way. Evening caught me in unfamiliar surroundings.

Suddenly I realized that I did not know the points of the compass, but trusting to luck I struck off through the timber and after a time came out on a highway, following which I soon came to a great rambling old house. I turned in to the unfenced, bramble-filled yard which lay between the highway and the house, which stood, weatherworn and forbidding, in the gathering gloom. The thought struck me that it was like a grinning evil face, the tangled yard its foul beard.

Even as I walked toward the sagging pillared portico, I saw a shadowy something leap from the shrubbery, stalk across the porch in front of me and rear, gigantic,

against the front door of the house. My blood seemed turning to ice and my heart clogged—the shadow was clear in the dusk, a great black mongrel dog. I realized, with a sensation of terror, that it was the dog I had seen that night in May on the hill above the old Factory House.

Then abruptly the silence was broken by the shattering roar of a shot, and the solid doors against which the dog was upreared were gashed and torn by buckshot. I heard a volley of tongue-searing oaths, and beside me, gun in hand, stood an old man, gnarled and stocky, who shrieked at me through his tangled gray beard: "Who are you? What do you want here? Did you see that damn' dog?"

I answered him as coolly as I could, telling him my name and that I had seen a dog come out from the brambles and leap up against the front doors; that the dog seemed to be there when the shot had struck the door. "Come, let us look," I said, "there must surely be blood-stains." But he replied to my overtures only with oaths, and bade me begone. I returned hastily to the highway and soon found my way to a little village whence I obtained conveyance to my uncle's home.

The next morning was bright and clear. As my uncle and I sat smoking on the porch of the old Factory House, I told him my odd adventure of the evening before, and for the first time spoke of what I had seen on the hill above the Factory House the previous spring.

My uncle smoked in silence until I said: "Uncle, is that old man crazy—and am I touched with the same madness?"

He replied: "No, I too have seen that dog; so have a few others. We've been seeing it for more than thirty years up on McNaughten's Hill where you saw it last spring, and we've also seen it around old Jim Crone's place there on the Eldorado Road."

"But," said I, "how could you keep seeing the same dog through thirty years of time? No dog lives that long!"

"I didn't say the dog was *living*, did I?" replied my uncle.

Then I fairly dragged this story from him, a story I tell in my own words:

FORTY-ODD years ago, Jim Crone and Jed Parker grew up on neighboring farms, as unlike as two young men could well be. Crone was squat, broad and powerful with long ape-like arms and bearded simian face, taciturn and sullen in manner. Jed Parker had the muscled beauty of a Greek athlete; fair of hair and with laughter forever on his lips, he was a favorite wherever neighbors gathered.

These two men were rivals from boyhood, and at last their rivalry came to a physical test. It happened in this wise: One day Jim Crone and some companions of his own kidney were loafing in front of one of the riverfront saloons at the Landing. Crone was amusing himself and his companions by torturing a quarter-grown black mongrel dog. The pup was snarling and whining with rage and fear, and struggling vainly to escape from the brawny grasp of its tormentor. Jed Parker, walking along the street, paused a moment and then with the swoop of a hawk had the whining pup in his hands. There was a heated exchange of words followed by a fight that has become a saga of the old Allegheny River wharves. In the end Jim Crone lay bleeding and helpless in the dust, mouthing threats while his conqueror walked unsteadily away, carrying the whimpering black puppy in his arms.

THEN within a year came the great Bear Creek oil strike of the early '70's and a Midas touch turned the bleak Allegheny hills and valleys into gold. In the rush came new faces; among them a Field Superintendent, Fred Holman, with his daughter Annie.

Again Crone and Jed Parker were rivals. There was competition between these two as to who should win the favor of the Superintendent's daughter. It soon became evident that the sunny face and kindly ways of Jed were winning him the love of pretty Annie Holman. Often they were seen together in the hills when the arbutus was in bloom, a great black mongrel dog forever at their heels. The dog had but two friends, the man who more than a year before had rescued him from torture, and the woman that man loved. Of all others he was coldly disdainful except when Crone crossed his path—then the dog became a snarling fiend.

Then a great gusher was drilled in on Jim Crone's farm. He became a millionaire almost overnight.

As the days passed an inexplicable coldness seemed to develop between Annie and Jed Parker.

Soon Jed and his black dog dropped out of sight. He had spoken to friends of a

proposed journey down into the new oil-field on Thorn Creek, but little heed was paid to the going or coming of one man in those hectic days.

Less than a year after riches came his way, Jim Crone married Annie Holman and built a great house on his farm, but soon bad luck seemed to pursue him. The wells he had drilled fell off in their production, and his speculations went wrong. From the day of their wedding his wife began to fade and fail, and before two years were gone, they buried her in the old Shiloh churchyard. The huge farm, its oil production gone, became a wilderness. Crone, now a veritable recluse, occupied only a couple of rooms in the great house, which slowly dropped into a ghostly ruin.

SUCH was the story my uncle told me as we sat on the porch of the old Factory House.

"And did Parker never reappear, uncle?" I asked.

"No," he replied; "it is said he went down into the Kentucky oil-fields, but I don't know. There's a mystery about it that will come to light some day."

"But what about the dog?" I own that with my question came a chill in my blood.

"The dog," replied my uncle, "has been seen up on the hill by the old McNaughten Mine, and also around Jim Crone's place for thirty years—and it's a good thing not to talk about." The old man lapsed into moody silence. . . . .

Several years passed. I returned to the scene of my pedagogical efforts, to hang out my shingle as a practitioner of medicine. The village had now grown to a flourishing town. My patients, however, were few, so I made haste to reply when toward the middle of a May night some one hailed from the street in front of my office. "Doc, old Jim Crone up on the Eldorado Road is mighty sick and you're wanted."

Emergency case in hand, I entered the car with the man, but I could gain no information from him other than that the neighbors had heard the uneasy lowing of the milch cows stabled in the barn. On investigating they had found old Jim Crone lying on the floor in the hallway of his home, a discharged shotgun beside him. The double doors of the house were riddled and torn with shot.

They had put him to bed and sent for me, but I found him beyond the reach of a physician's skill; death was a matter of hours.

The neighbors one by one took their leave and I was left alone with the old man who lay propped up in bed in a room that opened on the front hall of the house.

Under the stimulation of drugs my patient slowly fumbled his way back to consciousness. For some time he lay with his burning eyes fixed upon the open doorway of the room. Finally he asked: "Who are you, and what are you doing here?"

I answered, adding: "You are very sick, Mr. Crone. If there is anyone you would like to see, you had better tell me; there is a neighbor within call."

He muttered: "Don't want anybody. Just keep that front door locked, will you?"

I assured him it was closed and was occupied at a table, preparing some medicine, when the old man suddenly shrieked: "Oh, Doc! There he is, there he is! Don't let that damn' dog get me—don't let him get me!"

Hastily I turned to the bed. The old man was sitting bolt upright, his arms held up shielding his throat, a frozen horror on his ghastly face, his eyes fixed on the open door. Whirling about, I looked toward the doorway.

I saw standing there a great black mongrel dog, its neck ruff lifted and its blazing eyes fixed upon the figure now crouched on the tumbled bed. I seized a heavy chair and started toward the sinister shadow of the dog, but the old man moaned pitifully: "Doctor, stay here—don't let him get me! You can't kill him! I tried it—I cut his throat and left him in McNaughten's Mine when I— God Almighty, Doc, he's comin' for me!" With a horrible choking gurgle, he collapsed upon the bed.

I hurried to his side—but he had gone to his final accounting. When I turned again to the doorway it was empty and the soft spring dawn was stealing in at the window. . . . .

I stopped at the old Factory House on my way home to call upon my uncle, now a very old man, the last of his generation left in the Silver Creek Valley. When I told him the story of the night before, he instantly said: "Get officers and open the old mine on McNaughten's Hill!"

When we had cleared away the entrance, a hundred yards back in one of the old workings we found the skeleton of a man, the skull crushed—and close by, the bones of a dog.

There's real Humor in this touching tale of a down-and-outer who in vain sought to achieve the shelter—and food—of a jail.



Fight Like a Man!

By **Private Anonymous**

LAST December I came to Wichita, Kansas, with one definite purpose: I was looking for work. It was imperative that I find a job, for I was flat broke.

Wichita buzzed with an apparent rush of prosperity. There should be plenty of work about, so I went a-looking. Two days later, I was still looking for some place where I might use brain or brawn—mostly brawn—to earn my daily bread. By this time I had grown desperate. A feeling of close contact linked my stomach to four of my vertebræ. A half-starved look had cast its shadow on my face. I began to feel that I could devour anything. Even an old cart-horse, hitched to a delivery wagon, looked appetizing to my eye. I had suffered hunger during the War, but nothing compared to this.

I looked about me. There must be some way out—but how? I had nothing of value to pawn. There was no work to be found. And my pride would not permit me to solicit back doors for a hand-out. I tried to find work in some hotel or restaurant for my eats, but after being turned away from three or four places, discarded that plan.

THE evening of my third foodless day I went down near the Union Station. My plans were made. Jail—that was the idea! I chuckled. All I had to do was go out and pick a fight, be arrested, then locked up—and fed! That was the bright idea. It should be easy to do.

I was passing a hamburger stand on the corner, when gruff voices came from beyond the door. I stopped, looked in, then entered. Here was my first chance!

Three rough-looking customers, clad in greasy overalls, were seated on the stools beside the counter. One glanced sourly at me as I sat down on a stool at his side.

"What'll yuh have?" asked the cook.

"Just a second, buddy," I said. "I want to see what the cat's drug in your den"—looking at the man beside me.

The others whirled around facing me. One laughed.

"Funny?" I asked, looking him in the eye.

He swallowed a oversized chunk of meat. "Uh-huh!"

Desperately I got off my stool and faced them. The cook gazed at me in astonishment.

"I have a treat for you fellows," I bragged. "Then I am going to throw you out."

They stared at me for a second, then turned and glanced at one another.

"This gent," I said, pointing to the one nearest me, "is due for two black eyes—perhaps more." I looked at each one. "I have the goods, you know."

They glanced at one another again—I could see they were puzzled.

I stepped nearer the fellow. Every moment I expected to be branded the destination for a chunk of meat and bone that looked more like a ham than a fist.

"Get up!" I urged. "I can't hit a fellow when he's down."

He made no move.

"Come on, fight like a man!" I sneered.

For a second he seemed undecided. Then he smiled cheerfully.

"No, old top, I aint gonna battle you—I got no reason to!"

"That's right," spoke up the other two. "You can't pick a fight with us. Let's go, Tom!"

They left. I heard some of their remarks as they went out the door: "Drunk! No—dope! Full of it."

I stalked out of the place, baffled, but more determined than ever.

Farther uptown, at a "chilli parlor" beside the City Hall, I decided to try my luck again. I went inside. Several people were there: firemen, policemen, some in uniform.

I sat down beside a man a few years older than I. Later I learned that he was a detective. I ordered a bowl of chili. When it was served, I slid it over near his elbow. My scheme was ready for action.

"Hey, gimme that salt!" I growled.

He turned to me, his elbow pushing the bowl off the counter. It colored a circle on the dry sawdust that was scattered over the floor.

"You clumsy boob!" I shouted, climbing off my stool. "For two cents I'd soak you one in the kisser!"

"Pardon me, sir. I admit it was my fault. But please don't be so rude. There are ladies present, you see"—pointing to the farther end of the room.

"I'm speaking to you, not to the ladies, you big gazook!" I growled, stepping nearer him. "Come on, fight like a man!"

He looked straight into my eyes. "No, friend, I sha'n't do that. Your anger will soon leave; then you will be sorry." He turned and spoke to a man behind the counter. "Harry, give this gentleman another dish."

He then looked at me again. "I'm sorry, sir. I hope you enjoy the chili—Harry makes the best in town." Leaving a bill on the counter, covering the cost of my chili, he went outside.

A few minutes later I wandered across the street and into the post office. A sign attracted my attention:

JOIN THE ARMY
It Makes Men

The bowl of chili had made a home run with my stomach, and my nerves rallied somewhat. For the time being, I forgot that I was broke. But the notice in the post office appealed to me. My mind geared up, and memories of good old Army days returned. Here we were gathered again, a bunch of jolly good fellows, wild, reckless, full of life—and well fed!

I was now walking down Douglas Avenue. I passed a theater and the ticket girl smiled at me. I returned the smile and glanced at the billboards.

Kansas Boys Under Fire—35th Division

I WENT on. The Army was no place for me! But with this thought there came again the realization that I was broke. I turned a corner. A man was coming toward me—here was a chance again!

I bumped into him and he sat down suddenly on the sidewalk. Then reaching over, I grabbed his coat-collar and lifted him to his feet.

"Say, are you blind?" I stormed. "For two cents I'd shift you a haymaker!"

He gazed at me surprisedly.

"Come on, fight like a man!" I sneered.

A crowd began to gather. A policeman came pushing his way through the crowd.

"What's wrong?" he demanded.

"We had a fight," I informed him.

"Any complaints?"

I started to concoct a story, when my

opponent cut in: "No, Officer. Everything is all right."

"Then clear out!" ordered the cop.

"What if I refuse?" I asked truculently.

"To the jug with you, then," he growled.

Here at last was my chance! "Order the bus, old top," I smiled.

He fixed his gaze on me for a second or two, grunted, and walked away.

I cursed my luck. What kind of a town was this, anyway? Couldn't a fellow get in jail without a permit?

Next morning I re-enlisted in the Army.

The sergeant gave me a ticket good for a meal at the café across the street. I rushed down the stairs, out of the post office, and straight for said café. But just outside, I came face to face with the fellow I had bumped to the sidewalk the night before. I stepped aside. He did likewise, but facing me. There was a mean look in his eyes.

"I'm in a hurry," I said, made irritable by the gnawing pains in my stomach.

"So was I, last night," he returned. "Now we'll settle it—and go to jail!"

I made no move. In fact my brain refused to function.

"Come on, fight like a man!" he hissed, mocking my challenge of the previous night.

"I ca—"

He began operations. His fist hit me on the mouth, in the eyes, on the jaw, in the stomach, on the nose; in fact, everywhere. My skill was *nil*. The battle resembled the tactics of a mouse battling a tomcat.

By this time the police arrived and a call was sent in for the wagon. We were under arrest. Several people had gathered about. Just then the recruiting sergeant pushed his way through the crowd. He had witnessed the fight from an office window above.

"Officer, this man is a soldier. I will be responsible for him."

The policeman thought for a second or two. Then he looked at the sergeant, a slight smile on his face.

"All right. Take him away."

The sergeant obeyed. Back in the office, I told him my troubles and he sent out for a meal. Soon I began to feel decidedly better. I laughed until large tears rolled down my cheeks, and even the sergeant joined in as I related the story of how I couldn't get what I wanted, until after I didn't want it!

My Buddies

By

James Duffield

IT was a hot August day. In Canada the flowers, the rivers, the lakes and the trees are kept so frozen all through the long winter that they seem to say: "I am only allowed to be on display for a short time—so I must be at my best;" and on this fourth day of August, 1914, the summer was at its best.

I was in a small town of about twenty-five thousand population. The town lay on the side of a long rolling hill, with a lazy river winding its slow way around the foot of the hill. To the south of this rolling land was a small lake, shining in the hot August sun, while in the distance the old Presbyterian church stood in peaceful silence against a background of dense woods.

Usually everything was quiet and serene, but on this great fourth day of August, music could be heard from all over the town. In the streets were a mass of people, and flags and bunting floated everywhere. The street carnival was in full swing. The air was filled with the laughter of children; boys were parading the streets and young men and girls were dancing. This was a gathering of all types of people: farmers, bushmen, miners, Indians, old and young, and hundreds of schoolchildren, of which I was one. Fun-making had been going on for three days. This joy was to last a week—it was known as the "Old Boys' Reunion." All the boys and girls who had been born and reared in this quiet town were coming home from all countries, north, south, east and west.

The merriment was this day at its height. Smiling old men were wearing



A great adventure of the Great War set down with simple sincerity and fine feeling. You will remember this.

paper hats and girls were throwing flowers, when suddenly a dead silence fell over the throng of happy people. What was wrong, people asked one another. Before an answer could be given, a band began playing "God Save the King." What was wrong?

Then through the hush the dread word passed from one to another: "England has declared war on Germany." People quickly gathered in small crowds and excited voices could be heard everywhere.

Posters were soon placed in windows and feeling ran high. I had a sensation that I had never had before. I could not explain just what it was, for I was an American and *my* country was not at war. It was not patriotism, I discovered at last—it was adventure!

I WANTED adventure and adventure was always in my mind. Here was my chance. I would try to go! That night I lay in my bed trying to sleep, but with excitement keeping me awake for hours. At last I fell asleep. Just how long I had been sleeping, I do not know, when I awoke with a start, cold and frightened. I had been dreaming I was a soldier on the battlefields, fighting under the Union Jack. I could not sleep any more.

In the morning I called for my two chums and we went to the City Hall. Flags were flying—not the flags of yesterday, but war flags. Recruiting posts had opened and men were in line for half a mile, waiting their turn to enlist—men of all types, willing to serve their King, their country and their flag.

All day I hung around the recruiting post, watching men come out, smiling and shaking hands with one another and saying that they were willing to go anywhere for their dear old flag.

That night I asked myself again, "Shall I join the British Army?" The question was whether they would accept me, for I was just fourteen years of age. But I would try—I would lie about my age in order to go!

The next day my turn came. After waiting for hours in the burning sun, I stood at last in front of a large desk. It seemed that all eyes were on me. I stood up straight, trying to look as big as possible. I was afraid to speak and before I could find my voice, a tall gray-haired old Captain was at my side. He placed his hand on my shoulder, looking me square in the eye as he said: "Lad, you are a brick. It does my old heart good to see you here; we can not take you, but may God bless you for this."

My pulse throbbed, I felt hot all over and a tear rolled down my cheek as I turned to go. When I got to the bottom of the steps I sat down and cried. I could

not help it; but suddenly I realized what I was doing,—crying and trying to become a soldier,—that would never do!

I turned to see if anybody had seen me, then sneaked away to my room. Sitting on the edge of my bed with my head buried in my hands, I thought it over. I could not get it out of my mind. I must go—but they would not take me, here. Very well, I would go some other place, where I was not known!

I packed a small bundle and left that night, going about fifty miles to a city of sixty thousand people. Here, the next morning, I presented myself at a large recruiting station. At last my turn came. I sat down to fill out my application blank and when I came to the question, "How old are you?" I quickly put down "eighteen years."

From there I went to the medical offices for an examination and was rejected because I was half an inch too short and an inch under standard chest measurement.

I don't know just what I started to say, I was so disappointed, but with an effort I pulled myself together and urged: "Please let me go; surely there is *something* I can do!" The officer looked at me for a full minute, then smiling, he said, "I will, on one condition—that is, that you promise me you will try to develop your chest."

I was so overcome with joy that I ran to him, took his hand, and squeezed it with all my might. Placing both hands on my shoulders he added: "I am letting you go—but I don't think I should. Does your mother know that you have joined? Well, you wont get any farther than camp, for you will not be able to pass the examination there, but good luck to you and may God be with you!"

"Outside, all those men who have passed!" was the first order I heard. Outside I went. Here were about two hundred men of all types, most of them having been in the service at some time. A tall sergeant with a big mustache was looking us over as we came out. Everybody seemed to be looking at me. I felt that I was a marked man—some one was going to recognize me, and I would be sent back.

"Fall in!" What did that mean? What a harsh voice that sergeant had! I saw the other men lining up two deep, so I did the same, making sure to get in the rear rank so that I should not be seen, when the harsh voice said: "Get up in the front rank there, kid, and be quick about it! Don't take all day!" My heart sank within me, but I could not stop now. I would go through with it at all costs.

"Quick march!" Before I could realize what I was doing, we had entrained and were on our way to the training-camp. This pleased me for I loved to travel, but I was amongst strangers. I did not know one of these men, but I realized I was one of them and they were to be my buddies. It is of these men that I write this story. They were men of all trades and occupations—bankers, lawyers, clerks, tailors, blacksmiths, farmers, bushmen and laborers, but regardless of their ways they were my buddies. There is not sufficient paper in the world to write the individual characters and the heroic deeds that these men performed during the next two years.

CAMP at last! It was a war-time camp, one of those built in two or three days. It consisted of rows of long wooden huts and it was in one of these huts that I met my first buddy, dear old Jack. It was the second day after our arrival in camp. All the boys were out and I had been looking around the camp. Returning to my hut with the intention of shining my buttons and shoes and going to my cot, I sat down. At first I thought there was nobody in there but me, but upon looking over to the right-hand corner, I saw one of the men sitting on the edge of his cot sewing. He was mending a shirt. Feeling lonely, I went over and sat down beside him. He did not speak. I watched him for a while, trying to think of something to say. He was a big, broad-shouldered man, about five feet eleven inches in height, with fair hair, blue eyes, and a heavy jaw, which showed determination to do anything he set out to do, no matter what the cost might be.

At last he looked at me. His face was so kind that I said, "Can I mend that shirt for you?"

"Yes, you can," he replied.

I took the needle and thread and mended the shirt so well that he was surprised and asked me if I was a tailor. He spoke with a broad Scotch accent that was like music to me.

He talked to me for a while about myself and then he said, "Where do you sleep?"

I pointed to my cot on the far side of the house.

"Come and sleep next to me," he said.

So we carried my cot over beside his, and both went to bed.

Soon the men began to come in, some singing, some swearing and some drunk.

One of the men who was drunk came over to my cot and said, "Kid, turn out from those covers, and get me some water!" I was scared and did not move. Taking hold of the legs of my cot, he turned it over, throwing me out on the floor. Then he kicked me in the ribs.

In a second Jack was out of bed. He grabbed the drunkard by the throat and threw him heavily to the floor. By the time I got to my feet they were fighting.

Never had I seen a fight like this! Jack was getting the best of him when all at once the drunken fellow picked up a heavy leather belt, and swinging it heavily over his head, he brought it down on the side of Jack's face, making a deep cut from which the blood flowed freely. Before he could use it again, Jack with a blow to his chin knocked him down and some of the men carried him away.

I looked at Jack. His face was covered with blood. What could I say? I had only known him about three hours and he had done this for me! At last I went to him and taking his hand said, "Jack, why did you do this for me? You might have been killed!" But he smiled and said, "That's all right, son; you're my buddy."

It was then I realized what having a buddy could mean, and as I lay that night in my cot I thanked God for sending me a buddy like that. I made up my mind that I would stick by him through thick and thin.

Jack and I slept together, ate together and drilled together. In fact we were together at all times. Two months passed in hard training and by this time I was known in our battalion as "the Kid." Eleven hundred men called me "the Kid." They were all my buddies and loved me as I loved them. Ofttimes on a twenty-mile route march, when I grew tired they would carry my pack and one would carry my rifle.

ONE day I was called to the orderly room by my Captain. As I entered he smiled kindly at me, as he always did.

He was a man about forty-five years of age, his hair streaked with gray.

With that kind smile he said, "My boy, I have been thinking that this is too much for you. Don't you think you had better go home? I hate to see you go, for I love you just as though you were my own son, but I thought I would ask you now, for we are sailing in five days. What do you think about it?"

I thought a while, then replied: "It's too late now, Captain. I don't want to go back. Please let me go with you!"

On the fifth day we were on board ship and I was longing for it to start for fear they would take me off at the last minute.

The time came to start. The whistle blew, the engines throbbed and I felt the first move of the ship. Then our band played "God Be with You Till We Meet Again." It was not until then that I realized I was going away from home—away from my mother and loved ones.

I went up on deck and stood there a while, taking my long last look in the direction of my home. I did not feel like the same boy, not even when I recalled the wharf scene. That was one sight I can never forget—mothers, fathers, wives, children, brothers and sisters, sweethearts and friends crying "good-by" to their loved ones. Women fainted. Old men cried. I witnessed this, but not a soul was there to bid me good-by!

I sighed deeply and as I took a last look toward Canada, I muttered a prayer. I turned to go back to my cabin, not the boy of a few hours ago but a man—at the age of fourteen! I had been hardened in training and learned the ways of men.

I CAN NOT take you with me in England as it would take too long, but with the help of my buddies I finished my training, and during this time grew an inch and a half. However, I was still "the Kid" of the battalion.

While I was sitting in my hut one night an orderly came in and said, "The Captain wants to see you." My heart dropped, for I knew that I had been found at last and I feared I would be sent home.

Slowly I walked over to the orderly room. There he sat smiling at me. "Well," he said, "I guess you will have to leave us, son. We have a cable from Ottawa, Canada, that your mother wants you home. I guess you had better go."

I saluted him. "Captain," said I, "I am a soldier in your company. I am no longer your boy and I can not stop now. I must go on!"

Two days later we left England for France.

We were sent at once to stop the German advance. Six days and six nights we fought, our Captain being promoted to Major.

Oh, if I could only tell you all about that wonderful buddy! Like a father, he shared with me his blankets and his food.

He led us in battle and there was no place we would not follow. Day and night we were always ready to follow him.

Jack was always with me and the night before the main battle he saved my life. All that I have, all that I will ever have I owe to these two buddies of mine.

Then came the battle. We had been under shell-fire for three days and nights and in that time we had only two meals, which consisted of canned beef and hard biscuit. Nerve-racked, hungry, thirsty and tired—all this we were, but that line was ours to hold, and hold it we would at all costs. If we died, we died for Canada.

It was early morning when we went "over the top," every man gritting his teeth and ready to do his part, for we were fighting fifteen to one, against the pick of the German Army.

All day we held them back. By four P. M. our ranks had grown thin, but we still held on. While our rifles cracked and our guns roared, there came a veil of smoke. Was it smoke? No, it was gas!

Men went mad; men died, but still we went on. Jack was by my side when I heard the *"ping"* of a bullet and he fell at my feet. I was down beside him in a minute but the gas came on in green-gray clouds and we choked. After I had passed through this hell, I looked at Jack. He lay there very still.

"Jack, my buddy, what is wrong?"

He did not reply and when the gas had cleared a little I saw that he was shot through the face and was dying from the wound and the gas.

I looked around. There lay hundreds of my buddies, dead and dying—some mad, some crawling away, they knew not where.

A small band of men came out that night. We had been relieved and out of those eleven hundred buddies of mine we totaled two hundred and seventy-three.

AFTER we rested and had been reënforced both physically and in numbers our Major received word to move to another part of the front. It was at this particular place where I saw my Major as I want you to see him, always helping and cheering his men, always in front.

We had just taken an old farm and it was evening. Moving on to the German front we found that it was filled with wounded German soldiers. Our Major put a bandage on a German soldier and as he finished and turned to go on to another, this man pulled a pistol from inside his coat and shot the Major in the back. As he fell to the ground I ran to his side. For a minute I could not see.

Could it be true that this grand soldier, gentleman, father and hero among his men should be thus treacherously shot?

I knelt down beside him and asked what I could do for him.

He said, "Son, go on—your spirit is needed." Then he closed his eyes and was dead; that same dear smile was still on his kind face. As the stars peeped out overhead I knelt by his dead body and prayed, asking God to make me like him. He was gone—that dear father-buddy of mine!

We went on that night, driving the Germans before us. Strangely, my heart was not heavy with sorrow, for they were still with me, one on each side—cheering me on, showing me the way and keeping me from danger. And even to this day, they are still my buddies, for in spirit they are ever with me.

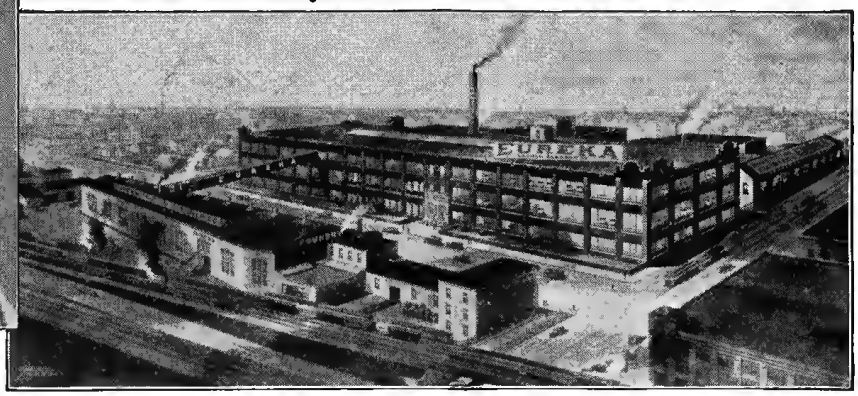
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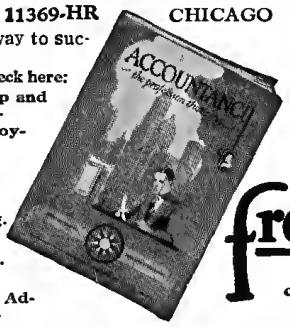
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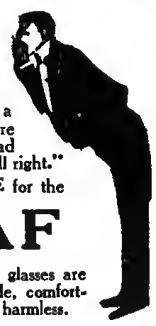
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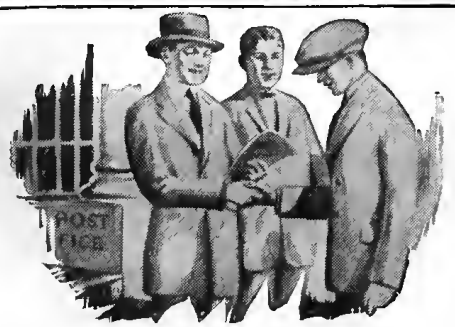
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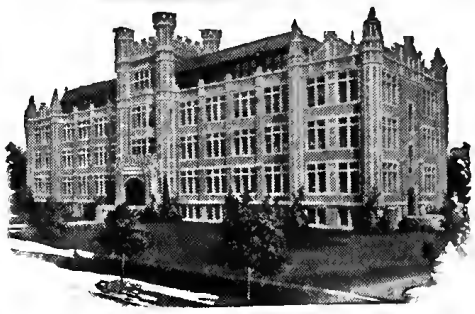
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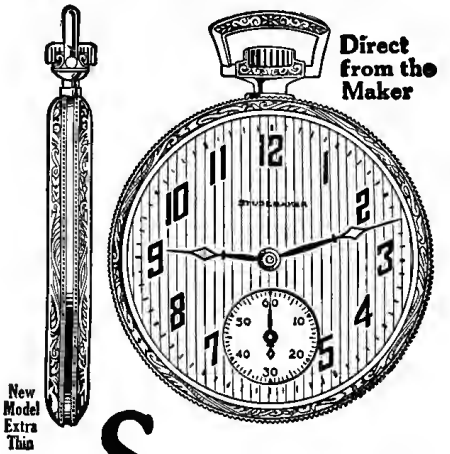
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